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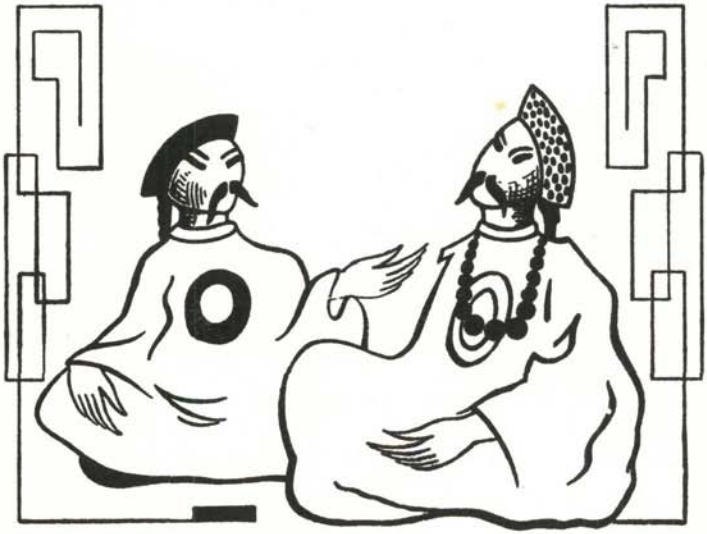

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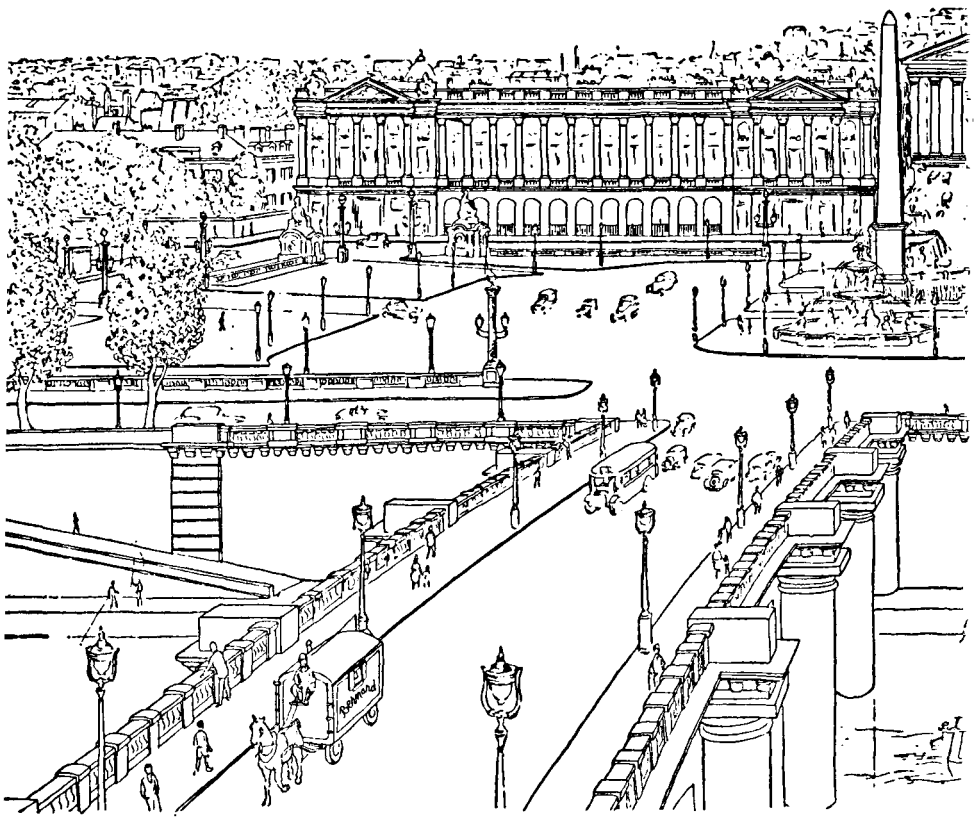

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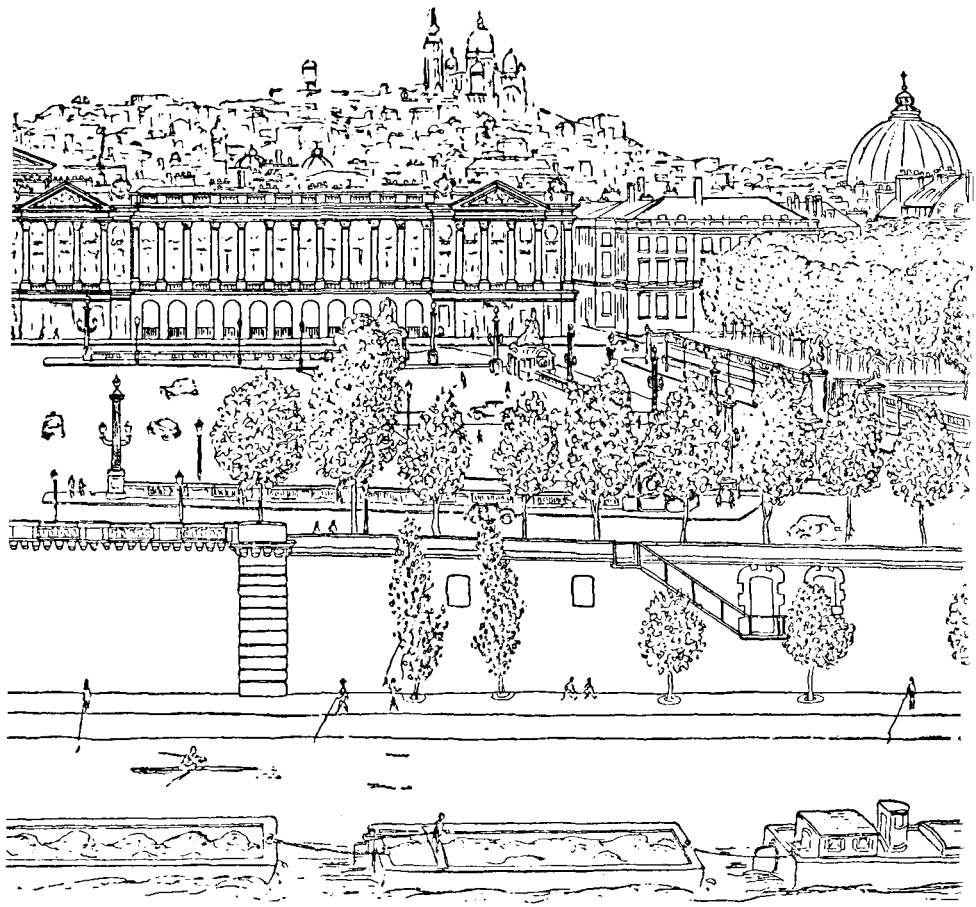

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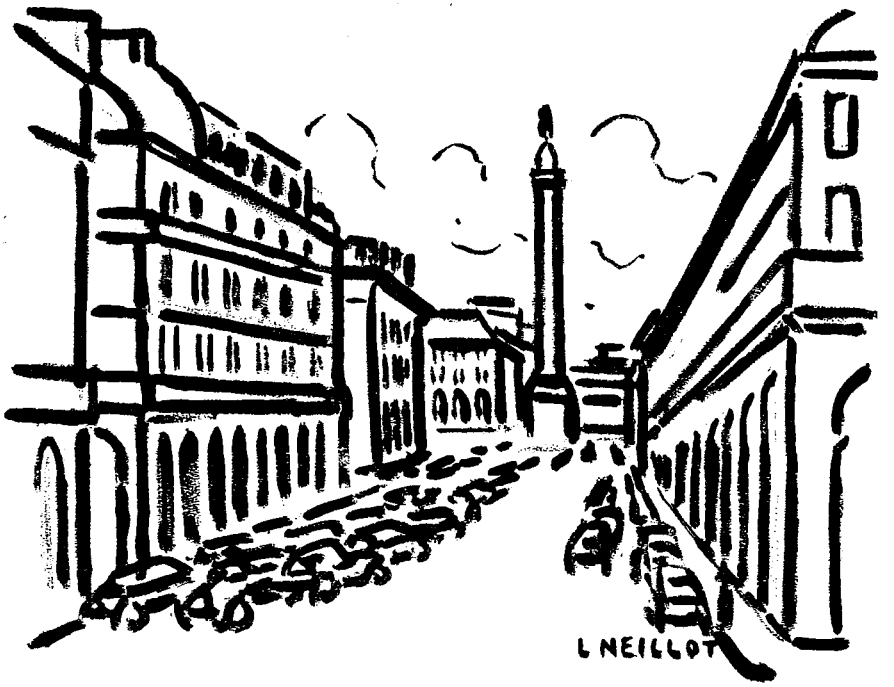

NUMBER SIXTEEN

FICTION

Tanizaki Junichirō	*The Victim (translated by Ivan Morris)*	**13**
William Fifield	*Summerhill Madhouse*	**53**
Marvin Schiller	*Les Saltimbanques*	**148**

INTERVIEWS

Truman Capote	*The Art of Fiction XVII*	**35**
Robert Penn Warren	*The Art of Fiction XVIII*	**113**

PORTFOLIOS

Roger Vieillard	*Elements — 6 engravings*	**26**
Tom Keogh	*Keogh on Jazz — 7 drawings*	**80**

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CHRONICLE

Christopher Rand	*Buddha's Anniversary*	89

POETRY

Philip Levine	*Two Poems*	21
Stephen Orgel	*Two Poems*	23
Robert Mezey	*Equatorial*	52
John Fairfax	*Call Up*	79
Charles Gullans	*Narcissus*	88
Wesley Trimpi	*Oedipus to the Oracle*	108
Robert Bly	*The Man Whom the Sea Kept Awake*	141
Henri Coulette	*Antony and Cleopatra*	142
Donald Justice	*Sestina*	144
Richard M. Elman	*Confession to E*	145
Theodore Holmes	*A Farmer's Getting Up*	146
Paul Petrie	*Pegasus: A Comedy in Eight Scenes*	163

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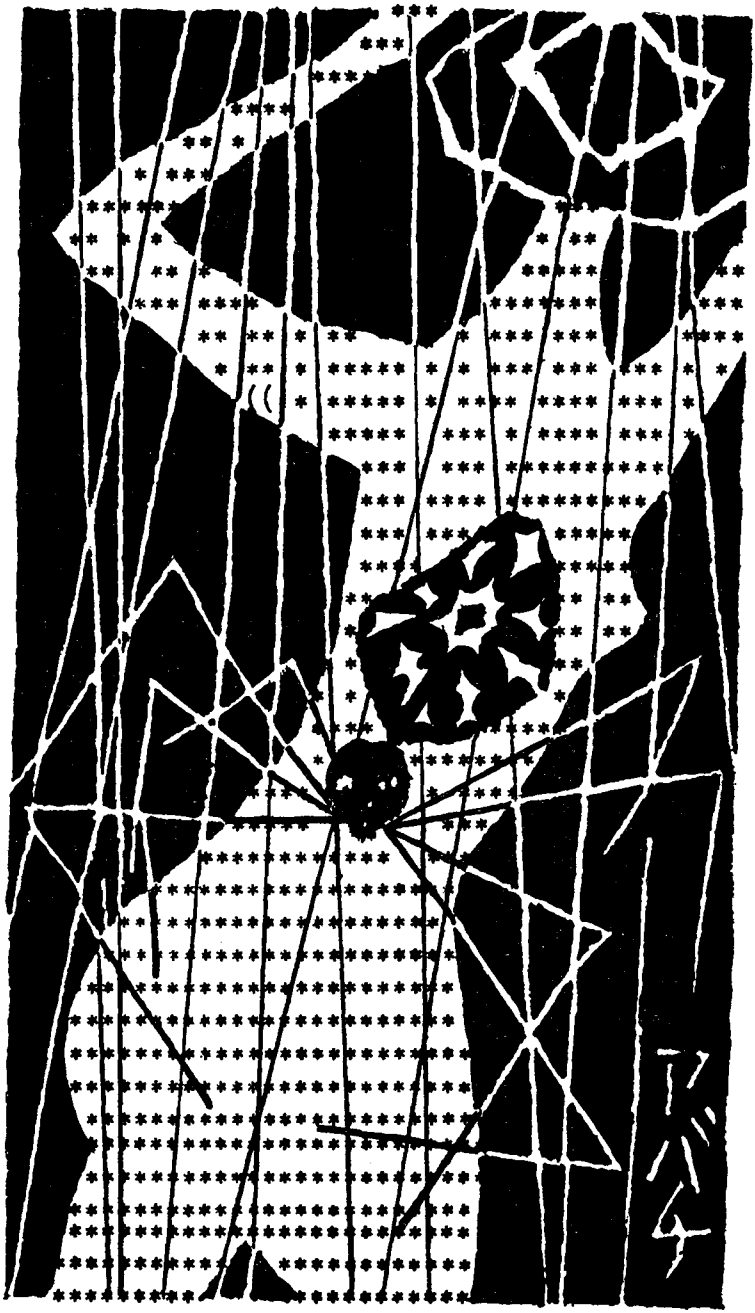

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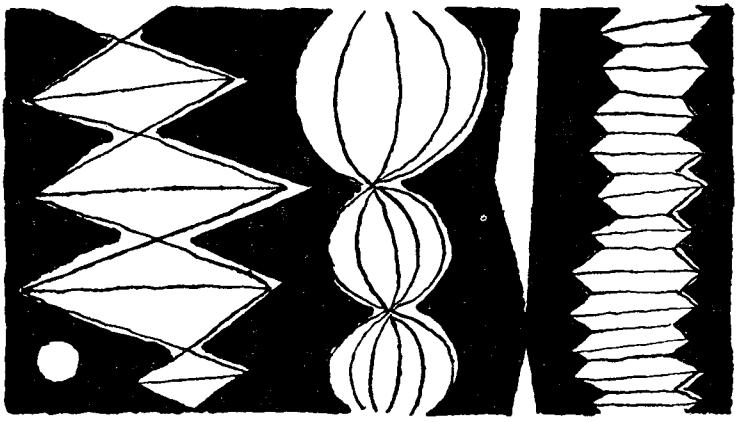

TANIZAKI JUNICHIRŌ

THE VICTIM

These things happened at a time when that noble virtue, frivolity, still flourished, when today's relentless struggle for existence was yet unknown. The faces of the young aristocrats and squires were not darkened by any cloud; at court the maids of honour and the great courtesans always wore a smile on their lips; the occupations of clown and professional teahouse wit were held in high esteem; life was peaceful and full of joy. In the theater and in the writings of the time, beauty and power were portrayed as inseparable.

Physical beauty, indeed, was the chief aim of life and in its pursuit people went so far as to have themselves tattooed. On their bodies, brilliant lines and colours were ravelled in a sort of dance. When visiting the gay quarters, they would choose as bearers for their palanquins men whose bodies were skilfully tattooed, and the courtesans of Yoshiwara and Tatsumi gave their love to men whose bodies boasted beautiful tattoos. Frequenters of the gambling dens, firemen, merchants and even samurai all had recourse to the tattooer's art. Exhibitions of tattoo were frequently arranged where

–Drawings by Mario Avati

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the participants, fingering the tattoo-marks on each other's bodies, would praise the original design of one and criticise the shortcomings of another.

There was one young tattooer gifted with an outstanding talent. He was much in fashion and his reputation rivaled even that of the great old masters: Charibun of Asakusa, Yakkôhei of Matsushimachô and Konkonjirô. His works were greatly prized at the exhibitions of tattoo and most admirers of this art aspired to become his clients. While the artist Darumakin was known for his fine drawings and Karakusa Gonta was the master of the vermilion tattoo, this man, Seikichi, was famous for the originality of his compositions and their voluptuous quality.

Previously he had achieved a certain reputation as a painter, belonging to the school of Toyokuni and Kunisada and specialising in genre paintings. In descending to the rank of tattooer, he still preserved the true spirit of an artist and a great sensitivity. He declined to execute his work on people whose skin or general physique did not appeal to him, and such customers as he did accept had to agree implicitly to the design of his choosing and also to his price. Moreover, they had to endure for as long as one or two months the excruciating pain of his needles.

Within this young tattooer's heart lurked unsuspected passions and pleasures. When the pricking of his needles caused the flesh to swell and the crimson blood to flow, his patients, unable to endure the agony, would emit groans of pain. The more they groaned, the greater was the artist's indefinable pleasure. He took particular delight in vermilion designs, which are known to be the most painful of all tattoos. When his clients had received five or six hundred pricks of the needle and then taken a scalding hot bath the more vividly to bring out the colours, they would often collapse half-dead at Seikichi's feet. As they lay there unable to move, he would ask them with a satisfied smile, "So it really hurts?"

When he had to deal with a faint-hearted customer whose teeth would grind or who gave out shrieks of pain, Seikichi would say, "Really, I thought you were a native of Kyoto

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where people are meant to be so courageous. Well, please try to be patient. My needles are unusually painful." And glancing from the corner of his eyes at the victim's face, now moist with tears, he would continue his work with utter unconcern. If, on the contrary, his patient bore the agony without flinching, he would say, "Ah, you are much braver than you look. But wait a while. Soon you will be unable to endure it in silence, try as you may." And he would laugh, showing his white teeth.

For many years now, Seikichi's great ambition had been to have under his needle the lustrous skin of a beautiful girl, on which he dreamed of tattooing, as it were his very soul. This imaginary woman had to meet many conditions both as to physique and character; a lovely face and a fine skin would not in themselves satisfy Seikichi. In vain had he searched among the well-known courtesans for a woman who would measure up to his ideal. Her image was constantly in his mind, and although three years had now elapsed since he started this quest, his desire had only grown with time.

It was on a summer's evening while walking in the Fukagawa district that his attention was caught by a feminine foot of dazzling whiteness disappearing behind the curtains of a palanquin. A foot can convey as many variations of expression as a face, and this white female foot seemed to Seikichi like the rarest of jewels. The perfectly-shaped toes, the iridescent nails, the rounded heel, the skin, as lustrous as if it had been washed for ages by the limpid waters of some mountain brook—all be-spoke a foot of absolute perfection designed to stir the heart of a man and to trample upon his soul. Seikichi knew at once that this was the foot of the woman for whom he had searched these many years! Joyously he hurried after the palanquin, hoping to get a glimpse of its occupant, but after following it for several streets, he lost sight of it around a corner. From then on what had been a vague yearning was transformed into the most violent of passions.

One morning a year later Seikichi received a visit at his house in the Fukagawa district. It was a young girl sent on an errand by a friend, a certain geisha from the Tatsumi quarter.

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"Excuse me, Sir," she said timidly. "My mistress has asked me to deliver this coat to you personally and to request you to be so good as to make a design on the lining."

So saying, she handed him a letter and a woman's coat, the latter wrapped in a paper bearing the portrait of the actor Iwai Tojaku. In her letter the geisha informed Seikichi that the young messenger was her newly-adopted ward and was soon to make her debut as a geisha in the restaurants of the capital. She asked him to do what he could to launch the girl in her new career.

Seikichi looked closely at the visitor, who though no more than sixteen or seventeen, had in her face something strangely mature. In her eyes were reflected the dreams of all the handsome men and beautiful women who had lived in this capital, where the virtues and vices of the whole country converged. Then Seikichi's glance went to her delicate feet, shod in street clogs covered with plaits of straw.

"Could it have been you who left the Hirasei Restaurant last June in a palanquin?"

"Yes, Sir, it was I," she said, laughing at his strange question. "My father was still alive then and he used to take me occasionally to the Hirasei Restaurant."

"I have been waiting for you now for five years," said Seikichi. "This is the first time that I have seen your face but I know you by your feet... There is something that I should like you to see. Please come inside, and do not be afraid."

So saying, he took the hand of the reluctant girl and led her upstairs, into a room which looked out on the great river. He fetched two large picture-scrolls and spread one of them before her.

It was a painting of Mo Hsi, the favourite princess of the ancient Chinese emperor, Chou the Cruel. Languidly she leaned against a balustrade, and the bottom of her richly brocaded gown rested on the steps of the staircase leading to a garden. Her tiny head seemed almost too delicate to support the weight of her crown, which was encrusted with lapiz-lazuli and cor ral. In her right hand she held a cup, slightly tilted, and with an indolent expression, she watched a prisoner

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who was about to be beheaded in the garden below. Secured hand and foot to a stake, he stood there awaiting his last moment; his eyes were closed, his head bent down. Pictures of such scenes tend to vulgarity, but so skilfully had the painter portrayed the expressions of the princess and of the condemned man, that this picture scroll was a work of consummate art.

For a while the young girl fixed her gaze on the strange painting. Unconsciously her eyes began to shine and her lips trembled; gradually her face assumed a resemblance to that of the young Chinese princess.

"Your spirit is reflected in that painting," said Seikichi, smiling with pleasure as he gazed at her.

"Why have you shown me such a terrible picture?" asked the girl, passing her hand over her pale forehead.

"The woman depicted here is yourself. Her blood flows through your very veins."

Seikichi then unrolled the other scroll, which was entitled "The Victims". In the center of the picture a young woman leant against a cherry tree, gazing at a group of men's corpses which lay pell-mell about her feet; pride and satisfaction were to be discerned in her pale face. Hopping about among the corpses, a swarm of little birds chirped away happily. Impossible to tell whether the picture represented a battle field or a spring garden.

"This painting symbolises your future," said Seikichi, indicating the face of the young woman, which again strangely resembled that of his visitor. "The men fallen on the ground are those who will lose their lives because of you."

"Oh, I beg you," she cried, "put that picture away." And as if to escape its terrifying fascination, she turned her back on the scroll and threw herself on the straw matting. There she lay with lips trembling and her whole body shuddering.

"Master, I will confess to you... As you have guessed, I have in me the nature of that woman. Take pity on me and hide the picture."

"Do not talk like a coward! On the contrary, you should

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study the painting more carefully and then you will soon stop being frightened of it."

The girl could not bring herself to raise her head, which remained hidden in the sleeve of her kimono. She lay prostrate on the floor saying over and over, "Master, let me go home. I am frightened to be with you."

"You shall stay for a while," said Seikichi imperiously. "I alone have the power to make of you a beautiful woman..."

From among the bottles and needles on his shelf Seikichi selected a vial containing a powerful narcotic.

The sun shone brightly on the river. Its reflected rays threw a pattern like golden waves on the sliding doors and on the face of the young sleeping woman. Seikichi closed the doors and sat down beside her. Now for the first time he was able fully to relish her strange beauty, and he thought that he could have spent years sitting there gazing at that perfect, immobile face.

But the urge to fulfil his design overcame him before many moments. Having fetched his tattooing instruments from the shelf, Seikichi uncovered the girl's body and began to apply to her back the point of his pen, held between the thumb, ring-finger and little-finger of his left hand. With the needle, held in his right hand, he pricked along the lines as they were drawn. As the people of Memphis once embellished with sphinxes and pyramids the fine land of Egypt, so Seikichi now adorned the pure skin of this young girl. It was as if the tattooer's very spirit entered into the design, and each injected drop of vermillion was like a drop of his own blood penetrating the girl's body.

He was quite unconscious of the passage of time. No one came and went, and the quiet spring day moved gradually towards its close. Indefatigably Seikichi's hand pursued its work without ever waking the girl from her profound slumber. Presently the moon hung in the sky, pouring its dreamy light over the roof tops on the other side of the river. The tattoo was not yet half done. Seikichi interrupted his

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work to turn up the lamp, then sat down again and reached for his needle.

Now each stroke demanded an effort, and the artist would let out a sigh, as if his own heart had felt the prick. Little by little there began to appear the outline of an enormous spider. As the pale glow of dawn entered the room, this animal of diabolic mien spread its eight legs over the entire surface of the girl's back.

The spring night was almost over. Already one could hear the dip of the oars as the row-boats passed up or down the river; above the sails of the fishing smacks, swollen with the morning breeze, one could see the mists lifting. And at last Seikichi brought himself to put down his brush. Standing aside, he studied the enormous female spider tattooed on the girl's back, and as he gazed at it, he realized that in this work he had indeed expressed the essence of his whole life. Now that it was completed, the artist was aware of a great emptiness.

"To give you beauty I have poured my whole soul into this tattoo," Seikichi murmured. "From now on there is not a single woman in Japan who can surpass you! Never again will you know fear, as in the past. All, all men will be your victims..."

Did she hear his words? A moan rose to her lips, her limbs moved. Gradually she began to regain consciousness, and as she lay breathing heavily in and out, the spider's legs moved on her back like those of a living animal.

"You must be suffering," said Seikichi. "That is because the spider is embracing your body so closely."

She half opened her eyes. At first they had a vacant look, then the pupils began to shine with a brightness that matched the moonlight reflected on Seikichi's face.

"Master, let me see the tattoo on my back! If you have given me your soul, I must indeed have become beautiful."

She spoke as in a dream, and yet in her voice there was a new note of confidence, of power.

"First you must take a bath to brighten the colours," Seikichi answered her. And he added with unwonted solicitude, "It will be painful, most painful. Have courage!"

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"I will bear anything to become beautiful," said the girl.

She followed Seikichi down some stairs into the bathroom, and as she stepped into the steaming water her eyes glistened with pain.

"Ah, ah, how it burns!" she groaned. "Master, leave me and wait upstairs. I shall join you when I am ready. I do not want any man to see me suffer."

But when she stepped out of the bath, she did not even have strength to dry herself. She pushed aside Seikichi's helping hand and collapsed on the floor, overcome by pain. Groaning, she lay there, her long hair draped across the floor. The mirror behind her reflected the soles of two feet, iridescent as mother-of-pearl.

Seikichi went upstairs to wait for her, and when at last she joined him she was dressed with care. Her damp hair had been combed out and hung about her shoulders. Her delicate mouth and curving eyebrows no longer betrayed the pain of her ordeal, and as she gazed out at the river there was a cold glint in her eyes. Despite her youth she had the mien of a woman who has spent years in geisha houses and acquired the art of mastering men's hearts. Amazed, Seikichi reflected on the change come about in the timid girl since the day before. Going to the other room, he fetched the two picture scrolls which he had shown her.

"I offer you these paintings," he said. "And also, of course, the tattoo. They are yours to take away."

"Master," she answered, "my heart is now free from all fear. And you... you shall be my first victim!"

She threw him a look, piercing as a newly sharpened sword blade. It was the look of the young Chinese princess, and also of that other woman who leant against a cherry tree surrounded by singing birds and dead bodies. A feeling of triumph rushed through Seikichi.

"Let me see your tattoo," he told her. "Show me your tattoo."

Without a word, she inclined her head and unfastened her dress. The rays of the morning sun fell on the young girl's back and its golden gleam seemed to set fire to the spider.

(*Translated by Ivan Morris*)

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TWO POEMS
BY PHILIP LEVINE

ARBOR DAY

We planted it in May of thirty-three.
Strange times for us. How could a child explain
The helpless eagle on the ice-box door,
Or why from school to park he trooped through rain,
Or with what strange design our teacher bore,
Its roots done up in rags, that little tree.

Twenty-odd years, and I return alone
And unprepared for what the years have done.
I claim what's mine—the loss absence begets—
The shrunken school yard theirs, the weeds; the sun,
Even, joining with these confederates,
Has threaded grass through the foundation stone.

Stones a mason could love, an owner trust,
Assembled here in tasteless elegance.
This street kept school boys on their daily march.
No boy lingered here, or tried this fence,
Or dared to peep at loungers on the porch
Where now an iron house-boy shows his rust.

Such show of wealth, such poverty of mind,
That dreamed to hold its surplus and its pride
To our despair. I revel in its fall.
The park holds trees and trees. Without a guide
Or friend how can I read the private scrawl
Of bark and leaves or know the undersigned?

I cannot find it, maple, elm, and oak,
They're all the same to me. These trunks are bare
And hold no clues. No lovers carved these boughs
With names of those they would endow with more
Than constancy. This place is free of vows,
Broken or otherwise, and those who spoke.

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Such solemn anthems in such neutral air.
Ludicrous with shovel, our teacher knelt,
Soiling her petticoat, beside the tree.
All that she said of it, perhaps she felt,
But which of us could tell, and who could see
The waiting world to which we soon fell heir.

The boy that laughed? I can't recall his name.
Promoter, fool, he lived for gaiety.
Fortune inverted that, as fortune would.
His brother died in Spain, and later he
Went overboard. We never understood
Why one who played so well gave up the game.

Terror and joy—boys thrive on those extremes,
But boyish days run out. This hidden tree,
That grows because it must, with neither care
Nor use, resigned to anonymity,
Could only be the model of despair,
A land to trample in our autumn dreams.

Regard it as an ensign of our fate.
We never chose our weather or our time.
Together or apart, each one receives
And sees the giver take. We learn to climb
The same way back, but no wind through these leaves
Establishes our difficult estate.

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THE DRUNKARD

from St. Ambrose

He fears the tiger standing in the way.
The tiger takes its time, it smiles and growls.
Like moons, the two blank eyes tug at his bowels.
"God help me now," is all that he can say.

"God help me now, how close I've come to God.
To love and to be loved, I've drunk for love.
Send me the faith of Paul, or send a dove."
The tiger hears and stiffens like a rod.

At last the tiger leaps, and when it hits
A putrid surf breaks in the drunkard's soul.
The tiger, done, returns to its patrol.
The world takes up its trades; the man his wits,
And, bottom up, he mumbles from the deep,
"Life was a dream, Oh, may this death be sleep."

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TWO POEMS BY STEPHEN ORGEL

NOCTURNE

My artifice you thought designed
For another end;
You have your own inventions, and
Made more than a friend.

Those meteors that filled our sky
Were mere *feu d'artifice*,
But then, the truest love itself
Is hardly rest in peace.

There is no warmth in such pretense,
In fires all for show,
Nor in the interludes; yet, "Love,
I've been unkind, I know"

Was all I sought, refuge from some
Dismissive, some old pain;
Let me then compound the grief,
Lie in your arms again

Until they seem a vice I'm not
Afraid to recognize,
Transformed, as your passion bears me
To such an apt device

That all my strait discomfort, tense
Dismay will not enforce
An ending to the action,
A suitable divorce;

And all desire lies in this
Compelling, in a night,
Some earlier, guiltier passion
Out of sight.

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THREE WAYS OF LOOKING AT SAINT SEBASTIAN

I

Bright sunlight! And the summer is a sword
Goading our sense; the very times conspire
With us to pierce that beauty; such a youth
Might satisfy a goddess in desire
(the living air is hot, the sunlight bold):

Our arrows, feathered things, fly out like birds,
Like swans or doves, or in the vivid day
No birds at all, but like a shower of gold.

II

Shadow his nurse, the sky had clouded over.
Now but for certain flecks of red he should
Have seemed some antique marble, all the fever
Of mortal things grown cold with mortal blood.
The change from life to artifact begun:

And he would turn, already white and cold,
To bone and gilded ivory, an icon
To please, in their cloisters, nuns growing old.

III

Red lights! Their lanterns lift the night as three
Young ladies of moderate riches and degree,
Adept at virginals, come where he lies.
The lewd glow turns their pallor, but they seem
To sanctify the ardor of their eyes.

Before his mouth a flame betrays no breath.
But lantern light discovers chaste Irene
As her white hands caress the saint in death.

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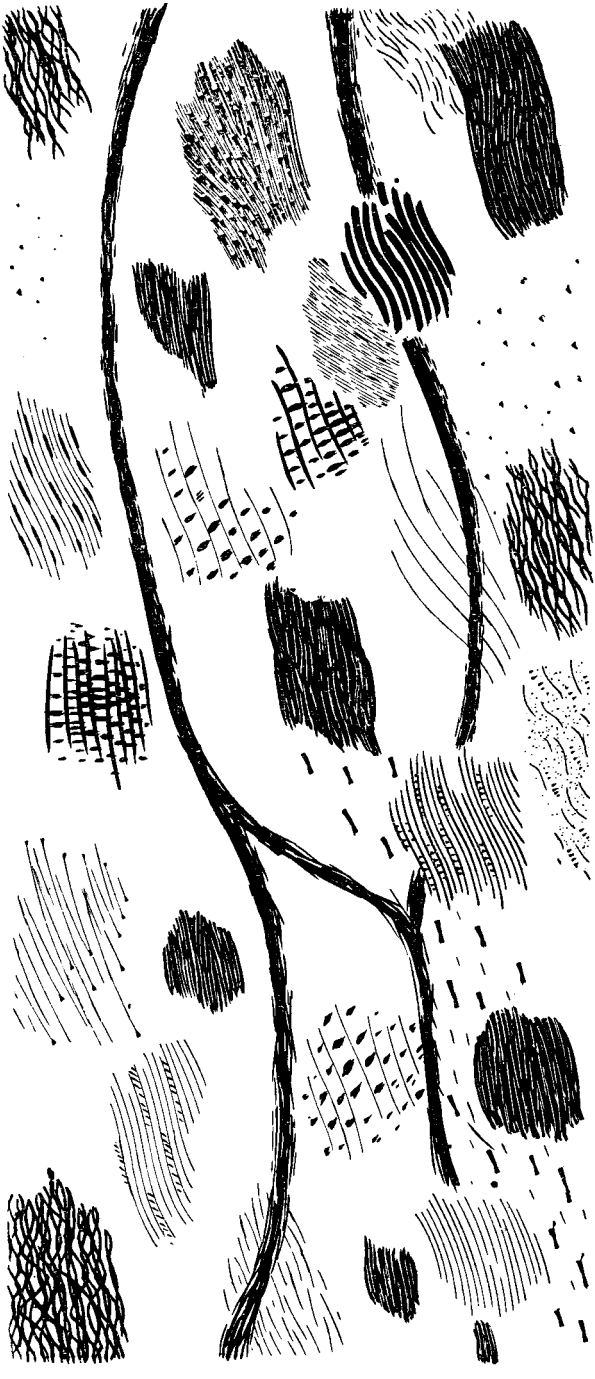

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ELEMENTS

Roger Vieillard

ROGER VIEILLARD is one of France's leading engravers. Born in 1907, he had served as an Army meteorologist in North Africa, experimented with wire sculpture and established himself as a banker before he learned the art of copper engraving at W. S. Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris in the mid-thirties. He quickly achieved recognition after the war for his illustrations of books of poetry and philosophy (Rimbaud, Descartes, Ecclesiastes, Sophocles, among others). His precisely controlled and resourceful technique was used sensitively in widely varying styles and moods: fantasies bordering on surrealism, geometric constructions, figurative symbols expressing human aloneness, pretension, aspiration. His 14 illustrated books and many independent engravings are now highly valued by collectors and his work has been shown all over Europe.

Vieillard's latest work is a series of 12 engravings called Elements. *Prefaced by a selection from Empedocles, they were done after two trips to Italy where study of the mosiacs and statues of Roman and Doric antiquity had led him to begin a new phase of his art. Eliminating all spatial depth, all direct human involvement, he does not portray the physical appearance of the elements but tries to interpret the fundamental rhythms and structure of natural forces as they gather, move and subside in the world. Like a composer varying a chosen group of chords, Vieillard uses minutely engraved sets of basic patterns (some are engraved larger at left) which run throughout the series and impart to it a unity which reflects the theme of Empedocles' text: "...Only in the measure that the Many is born from the One and resolved in it are the elements mortal..."*

—R. S.

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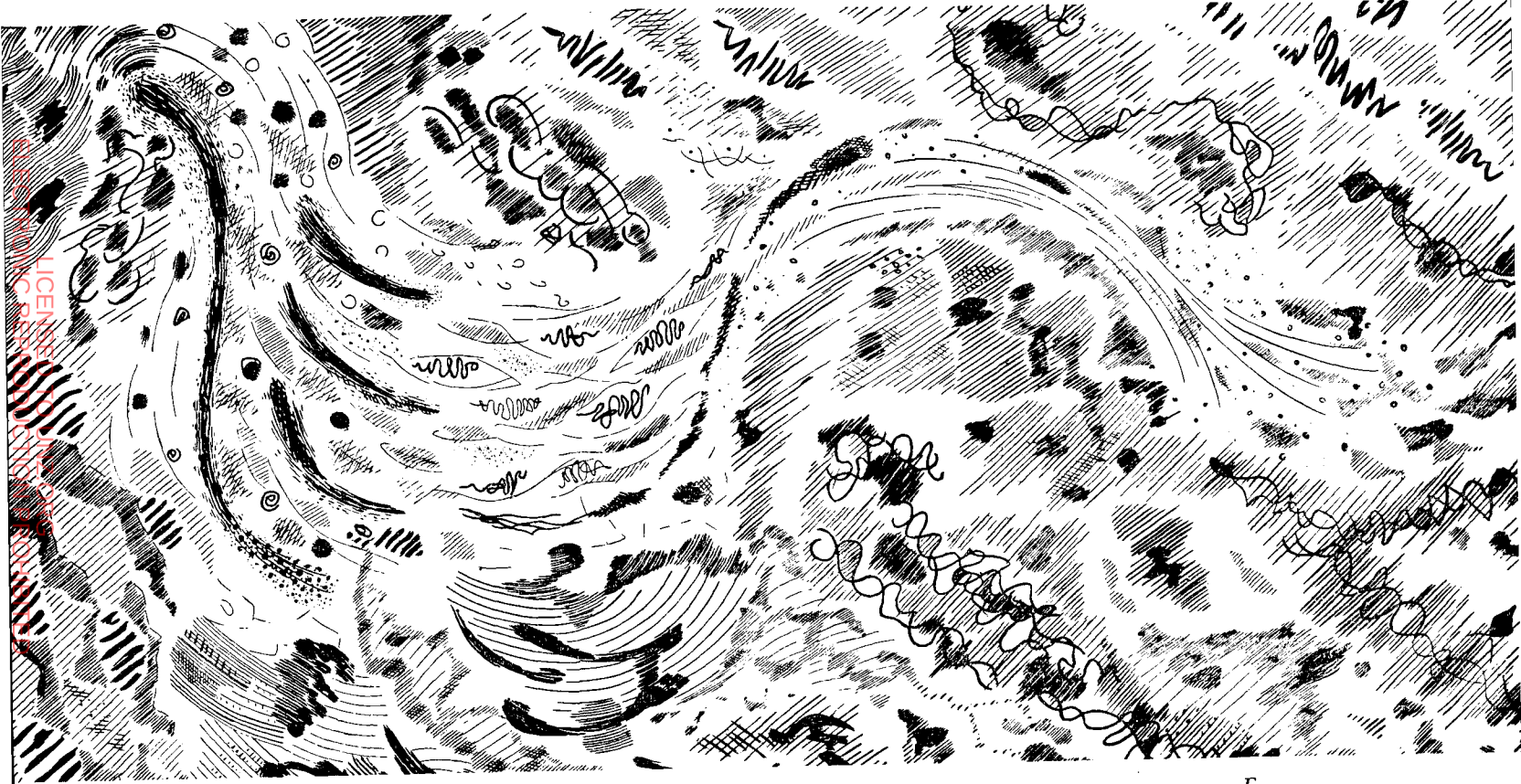

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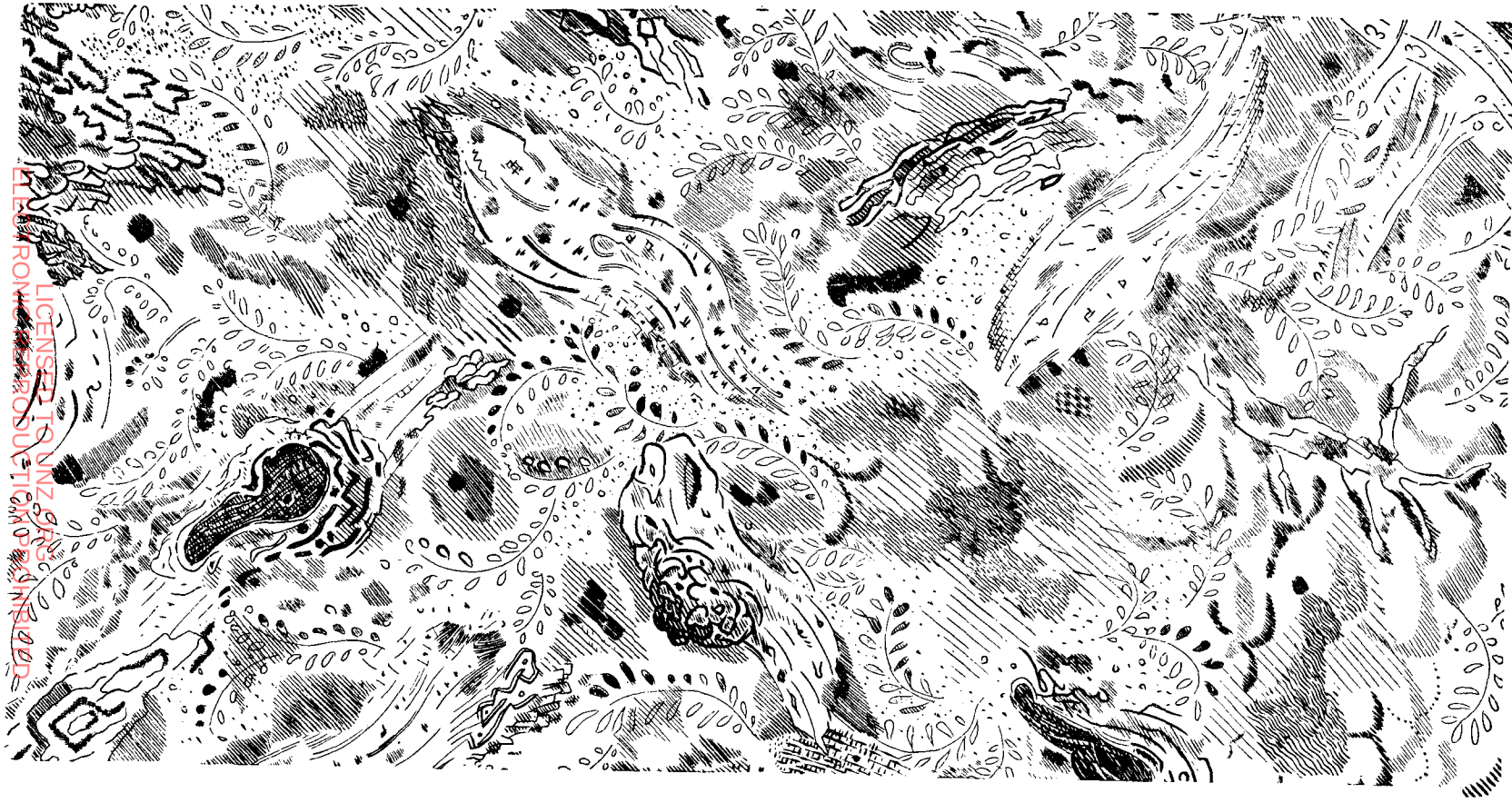

Oliviers

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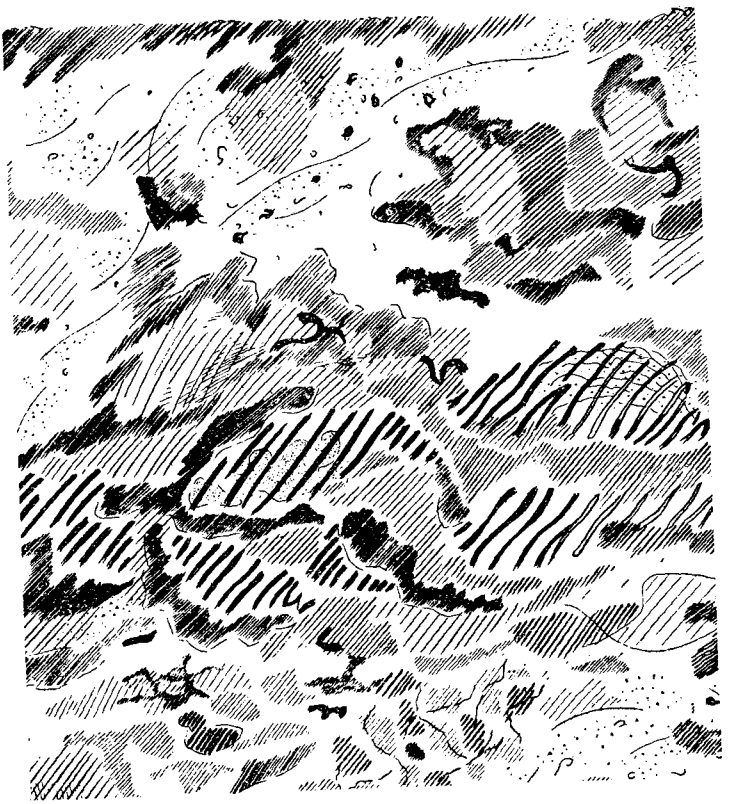

Nuages

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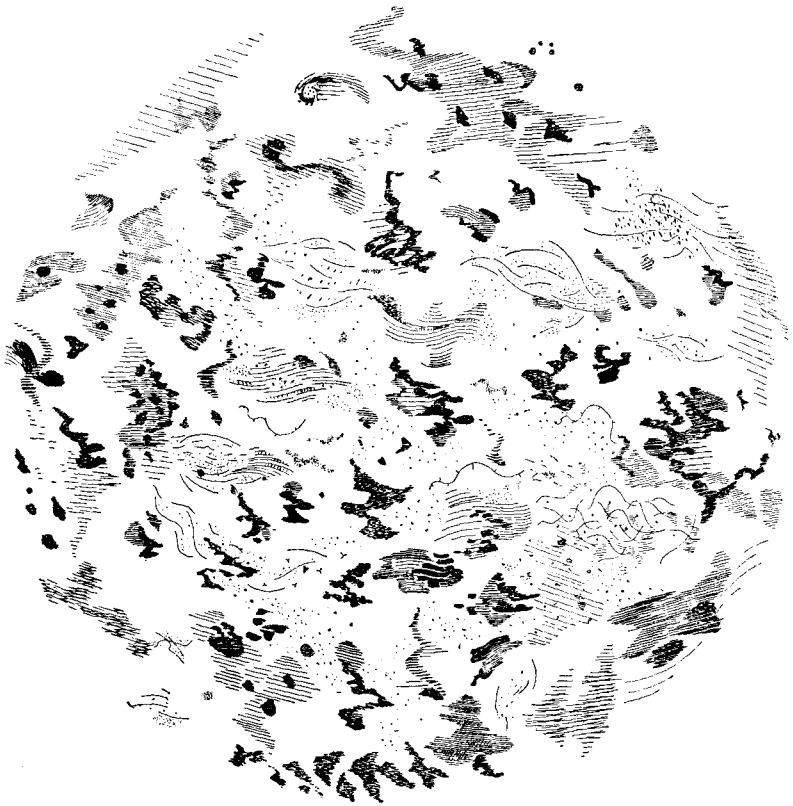

Course des éléments

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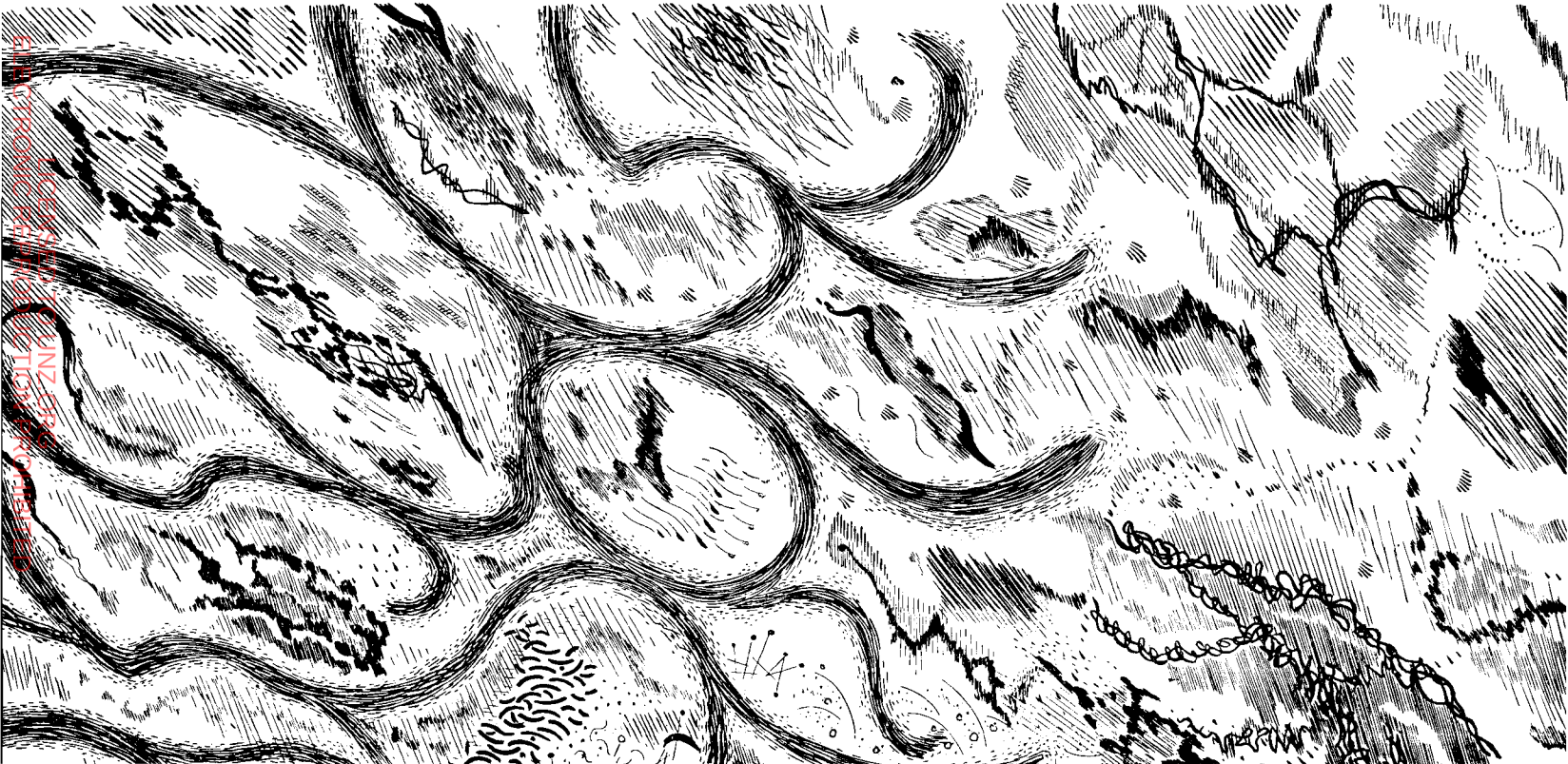

ELEKTRONISCHE KOPIE (UNKORR.) DES ORIGINALMANUSKRIPTS

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She spent entire days slopping about in her tiny, sweatbox kitchen (José says I'm a fabulous cook. Better than the Colony. Who would have thought I had such a great natural talent. A month ago I couldn't scramble eggs.") And she still couldn't, for that matter. The simpler dishes, steak, a frozen salad, were beyond her; instead, she fed José outré soups (brandied black terrapin poured into avocado shells), dubious innovations (chicken and rice served with a chocolate sauce: "An East Indian specialty, darling."), Mexican novelties

A manuscript page from Truman Capote's new short novel Breakfast at Tiffany's

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Sketch by Rosalie Seidler

THE ART OF FICTION XVII

TRUMAN CAPOTE

Truman Capote lives in a big yellow house in Brooklyn Heights which he has recently restored with the taste and elegance that is generally characteristic of his undertakings. As I entered he was head and shoulders inside a newly arrived crate containing a wooden lion.

"There!" he cried as he tugged it out to a fine birth amid a welter of sawdust and shavings. "Did you ever see anything so splendid? Well, that's that. I saw him and I bought him. Now he's all mine."

"He's large," I said. "Where are you going to put him?"

"Why in the fireplace, of course", said Capote. "Now come along into the parlor while I get someone to clear away this mess..."

The parlor is Victorian in character and contains Capote's

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most intimate collection of art objects and personal treasures which, for all their orderly arrangement on polished tables and bamboo bookcases, somehow remind you of the contents of a very astute little boy's pockets. There is, for instance, a golden easter egg brought back from Russia, an iron dog, somewhat the worse for wear, a Fabergé pillbox, some marbles, blue ceramic fruit, paperweights, Battersea boxes, picture postcards and old photographs. In short everything that might seem useful or handy in a day's adventuring around the world.

Capote himself fits in very well with this impression at first glance. He is small and blond with a forelock that persists in falling down into his eyes and his smile is sudden and sunny. His approach to anyone new is one of open curiosity and friendliness. He might be taken in by anything and, in fact, seems only too ready to be. There is something about him though that makes you feel that for all his willingness it would be hard to pull any wool over his eyes and maybe better not to try to.

There was a sound of scuffling in the hall and Capote came in, preceded by a large bulldog with a white face.

"This is Bunky," he said.

Bunky sniffed me over and we sat down.

* * *

INTERVIEWER

When did you first start writing?

CAPOTE

When I was a child of about ten or eleven and lived near Mobile. I had to go into town on Saturdays to the dentist and I joined the Sunshine Club that was organized by the Mobile Press Register. There was a children's page with contests for writing and for coloring pictures and then every Saturday afternoon they had a party with free Nehi and Coca Cola. The prize for the short story writing contest was either a

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pony or a dog, I've forgotten which, but I wanted it badly. I had been noticing the activities of some neighbors who were up to no good, so I wrote a kind of *roman* à *clef* called *Old Mr. Busybody* and entered it in the contest. The first installment appeared one Sunday, under my real name of Truman Streckfus Persons. Only somebody suddenly realized that I was serving up a local scandal as fiction, and the second installment never appeared. Naturally, I didn't win a thing.

INTERVIEWER

Were you sure then that you wanted to be a writer?

CAPOTE

I realized that I *wanted* to be a writer. But I wasn't sure *I would* be until I was fifteen or so. At that time I had immodestly started sending stories to magazines and literary quarterlies. Of course no writer ever forgets their first acceptance; but one fine day when I was seventeen, I had my first, my second and third, all in the same morning's mail. Oh, I'm here to tell you, dizzy with excitement is no mere phrase!

INTERVIEWER

What did you first write?

CAPOTE

Short stories. And my more unswerving ambitions still revolve around this form. When seriously explored, the short story seems to me the most difficult and disciplining form of prose writing extant. Whatever control and technique I may have I owe entirely to my training in this medium.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean exactly by 'control'?

CAPOTE

I mean maintaining a stylistic and emotional upper hand over your material. Call it precious and go to hell, but I believe a story can be wrecked by a faulty rhythm in a

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sentence (especially if it occurs toward the end) or a mistake in paragraphing, even punctuation. Henry James is the maestro of the semi-colon. Hemingway is a first rate paragrapher. From the point of view of ear, Virginia Woolf never wrote a bad sentence. I don't mean to imply that I successfully practice what I preach... I try that's all.

INTERVIEWER

How does one arrive at short story technique?

CAPOTE

Since each Story presents its own technical problems, obviously one can't generalize about them on a $2 \times 2 = 4$ basis. Finding the right form for your story is simply to realize the most *natural* way of telling the story. The test of whether or not a writer has devined the natural shape of his story is just this: after reading it, can you imagine it differently, or does it silence your imagination and seem to you absolute and final? As an orange is final. As an orange is something nature has made just right.

INTERVIEWER

Are there devices one can use in improving one's technique?

CAPOTE

Work is the only device I know of. Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade, just as painting does, or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself. Even Joyce, our most extreme disregarder, was a superb craftsman; he could write Ulysses *because* he could write Dubliners. Too many writers seem to consider the writing of short stories as a kind of finger exercise. Well, in such cases, it is certainly only their fingers they are exercising.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have much encouragement in those early days and by whom?

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CAPOTE

Good Lord! I'm afraid you've let yourself in for quite a saga. The answer is a snake's nest of no's and a few yesses. You see, not altogether but by and large my childhood was spent in parts of the country and among peoples unprovided with any semblance of a cultural attitude. Which was probably not a bad thing, in the long view. It toughened rather too soon to swim against the current... indeed, in some areas I developed the muscles of a veritable barracuda, especially in the art of dealing with one's enemies, an art no less necessary than knowing how to appreciate one's friends.

But to go back. Naturally in the milieu aforesaid, I was thought somewhat *eccentric*, which was fair enough, and *stupid*, which I suitably resented. Still, I despised school... or schools, for I was always changing from one to another... and year after year failed the simplest subjects out of loathing and boredom. I played hooky at least twice a week and was always running away from home. Once I ran away with a friend who lived across the street... a girl much older than myself who in later life achieved a certain fame. Because she murdered a half-dozen people and was electrocuted at Sing Sing. Someone wrote a book about her. They called her the Lonely Hearts Killer. But there, I'm wandering again. Well, finally, I guess I was around twelve, the principal at the school I was attending paid a call on my family, and told them that in his opinion, and in the opinion of the faculty, I was "subnormal". He thought it would be the sensible, the humane action to send me to some special school equipped to handle backward brats. Whatever they may have privately felt, my family as a whole took offical umbrage, and in an effort to prove I wasn't subnormal pronto packed me off to a psychiatric study clinic at a university in the east where I had my I.Q. inspected. I enjoyed it thoroughly and—guess what?—came home a genius, so proclaimed by science. I don't know who was the more appalled: my former teachers, who refused to believe it, or my family, who didn't want to believe it—they'd just hoped to be told I was a nice normal boy. Ha ha! But as for me, I was exceedingly pleased—went

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around staring at myself in mirrors and sucking in my cheeks and thinking over in my mind, my lad, you and Flaubert... or de Maupassant or Mansfield or Proust or Chekov or Wolfe, whoever was the idol of the moment.

I began writing in fearful earnest... my mind zoomed all night every night, and I don't think I really slept for several years. Not until I discovered that whiskey could relax me. I was too young, fifteen, to buy it myself, but I had a few older friends who were most obliging in this respect and I soon accumulated a suitcase full of bottles, everything from blackberry brandy to bourbon. I kept the suitcase hidden in a closet. Most of my drinking was done in the late afternoon, then I'd chew a handful of Sensen and go down to dinner where my behavior, my glazed silences, gradually grew into a source of general consternation. One of my relatives used to say: "Really, if I didn't know better, I'd swear he was dead drunk." Well, of course, this little comedy, if such it was, ended in discovery and some disaster, and it was many a moon before I touched another drop. But I seem to be off the track again. You asked about encouragement. The first person who ever really helped me was, strangely, a teacher. An English teacher I had in high school, Catherine Wood, who backed my ambitions in every way, and to whom I shall always be grateful. Later on, from the time I first began to publish, I had all the encouragement anyone could ever want, notably from Margarita Smith, fiction editor of *Mademoiselle*, Mary Louise Aswell of *Harper's Bazaar*, and Robert Linscott of Random House. You would have to be a glutton indeed to ask for more good luck and fortune than I had at the beginning of my career.

INTERVIEWER

Did the three editors you mention encourage you simply by buying your work, or did they offer criticism, too?

CAPOTE

Well, I can't imagine anything *more* encouraging than having someone buy your work. I never... indeed, am

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physically incapable... of writing anything that I don't think will be paid for. But, as a matter fact, the persons mentioned, and some others as well, were all very generous with advice.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like anything you wrote long ago as well as what you write now?

CAPOTE

Yes. For instance, last summer I read my novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* for the first time since it was published eight years ago, and it was quite as though I were reading something by a stranger. The truth is, I am a stranger to that book; the person who wrote it seems to have so little in common with my present self. Our mentalities, our interior temperatures are entirely different. Despite awkwardnesses, it has an amazing intensity, a real voltage... I am very pleased I was able to write the book when I did, otherwise it would never have been written. I like *The Grass Harp* too and several of my short stories, though not *Miriam* which is a good stunt but nothing more. No, I prefer *Children on Their Birthdays* and *Shut A Final Door*, and oh, some others, especially a story not too many people seemed to care for, *Master Misery*, which was in my collection *A Tree of Night*.

INTERVIEWER

You recently published a book about the *Porgy and Bess* trip to Russia. One of the most interesting things about the style was its unusual detachment even by comparison to the reportings of journalists who have spent many years recording events in an impartial way. One had the impression that this version must have been as close to the truth as it is possible to get through another person's eyes, which is surprising when you consider that most of your work has been characterized by its very personal quality.

CAPOTE

Actually, I don't consider the style of this book, *The Muses Are Heard*, as markedly different from my fictional style.

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Perhaps, the content, the fact that it is about real events, makes it seem so. After all, *Muses* is straight reporting, and in reporting one is occupied with literalness and surfaces, with implication without comment—one can't achieve immediate depths the way one may in fiction. However, one of the reasons I've wanted to do reportage was to prove that I could apply my style to the realities of journalism. But I believe my fictional method is equally detached—emotionality makes me lose writing control: I have to exhaust the emotion before I feel clinical enough to analyze and project it, and as far as I'm concerned that's one of the laws of achieving true technique. If my fiction seems more personal it is because it depends on the artist's most personal and revealing area: his imagination.

INTERVIEWER

How do you exhaust the emotion? Is it only a matter of thinking about the story over a certain length of time, or are there other considerations?

CAPOTE

No, I don't think it is merely a matter of time. Suppose you ate nothing but apples for a week. Unquestionably you would exhaust your appetite for apples and most certainly know what they taste like. By the time I write a story I may no longer have any hunger for it, but I feel that I thoroughly know its flavor. The *Porgy and Bess* articles are not relevant to this issue. That was reporting and "emotions" were not much involved. At least not the difficult and personal territories of feeling that I mean. I seem to remember reading that Dickens, as he wrote, choked with laughter over his own humour and dripped tears all over the page when one of his characters died. My own theory is that the writer should have considered his wit and dried his tears long, long before setting out to evoke similar reactions in a reader. In other words, I believe the greatest intensity in art in all its shapes is achieved with a deliberate, hard and cool head. For example, Flaubert's *A Simple Heart*. A warm story, warmly written; but it could only be the work of an artist

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muchly aware of true techniques, i.e. necessities. I'm sure, at some point, Flaubert must have felt the story very deeply... but *not* when he wrote it. Or, for a more contemporary example, take that marvelous short novel of Katherine Anne Porter's, *Noon Wine*. It has such intensity, such a sense of happening-how, yet the writing is so controlled, the inner rhythms of the story so immaculate, that I feel fairly certain Miss Porter was at some distance FROM her material.

INTERVIEWER

Have your best stories or books been written at a comparatively tranquil moment in your life or do you work better because or in spite of emotional stress?

CAPOTE

I feel slightly as though I've never lived a tranquil moment, unless you count what an occasional nembutal induces. Though, come to think of it, I spent two years in a very romantic house on top of a mountain in Sicily, and I guess this period could be called tranquil. God knows, it was quiet. That's where I wrote *The Grass Harp*. But I must say an iota of stress, striving toward deadlines, does me good.

INTERVIEWER

You have lived abroad for the last eight years. Why did you decide to return to America?

CAPOTE

Because I'm an American, and never could be, and have no desire to be, anything else. Besides, I like cities, and New York is the only real city-city. Except for a two-year stretch, I came back to America every one of those eight years, and I never entertained expatriate notions. For me, Europe was a method of acquiring perspective and an education, a stepstone toward maturity. But there *is* the law of diminishing returns, and about two years ago it began to set in: Europe had given me an enormous lot, but suddenly I felt as though the process were reversing itself... there seemed to be a taking away.

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So I came home, feeling quite grown up and able to settle down where I belong. Which doesn't mean I've bought a rocking chair and turned to stone. No indeed. I intend to have footloose escapades as long as frontiers stay open.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read a great deal?

CAPOTE

Too much. And anything, including labels and recipes and advertisements. I have a passion for newspapers... read all the New York dailies every day, and the Sunday editions of several foreign magazines too. The ones I don't buy I read standing at news stands. I average about five books a week... the normal length novel takes me about two hours. I enjoy thrillers and would like someday to write one. Though I prefer first-rate fiction, for the last few years my reading seems to have been concentrated on letters and journals and biographies. It doesn't bother me to read while I am writing... I mean, I don't suddenly find another writer's style seeping out of my pen. Though once, during a lengthy spell of James, my own sentences *did* get awfully long.

INTERVIEWER

What writers have influenced you the most?

CAPOTE

So far as I consciously know, I've never been aware of direct literary influence, though several critics have informed me that my early works owe a debt to Faulkner and Welty and McCullers. Possibly. I'm a great admirer of all three; and Katherine Anne Porter, too. Though I don't think, when really examined, that they have much in common with each other, or me, except that we were all born in the South. Between thirteen and sixteen are the ideal, if not the only ages for succumbing to Thomas Wolfe... he seemed to me a great genius then, and still does, though I can't read a line of it now. Just as other youthful flames have guttered: Poe,

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Dickens, Stevenson. I love them in memory, but find them unreadable. These are the enthusiasms that remain constant: Flaubert, Turgenev, Chekov, Jane Austen, James, E.M. Forster, De Maupassant, Rilke, Proust, Shaw, Willa Cather... oh the list is too long, so I'll end with James Agee, a beautiful writer whose death over two years ago was a real loss. Agee's work, by the way, was much influenced by the films. I think most of the younger writers have learned and borrowed from the visual, structural side of movie technique. I have.

INTERVIEWER

You've written for the films, haven't you? What was that like?

CAPOTE

A lark. At least the one picture I wrote, *Beat the Devil*, was tremendous fun. I worked on it with John Houston while the picture was actually being made on location in Italy. Sometimes scenes that were just about to be shot were written right on the set. The cast were completely bewildered... sometimes even Houston didn't seem to know what was going on. Naturally the scenes had to be written out of a sequence, and there were peculiar moments when I was carrying around in my head the only real outline of the so-called plot. You never saw it? Oh you should. It's a marvelous joke. Though I'm afraid the producer didn't laugh. The hell with them. Whenever there's a revival I go to see it and have a fine time.

Seriously though, I don't think a writer stands much chance of imposing himself on a film unless he works in the warmest rapport with the director or is himself the director. It's so much a director's medium that the movies have developed only one writer who, working exclusively as a scenarist, could be called a film-genius. I mean that shy delightful little peasant, Zavattini. What a visual sense! Eighty percent of the good Italian movies were made from Zavattini scripts... all of the Di Sica pictures, for instance. De Sica is a charming man, a gifted and deeply sophisticated person; nevertheless he's mostly a megaphone for Zavattini,

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his pictures are absolutely Zavattini's creations: every nuance, mood, every bit of business is clearly indicated in Zavattini's scripts.

INTERVIEWER

What are some of your writing habits? Do you use a desk? Do you write on a machine?

CAPOTE

I am a completely horizontal author... I can't think unless I'm lying down, either in bed or stretched on a couch and with a cigarette and coffee handy. I've got to be puffing and sipping. As the afternoon wears on, I shift from coffee to mint tea to sherry to martinis. No, I don't use a typewriter. Not in the beginning. I write my first version in long-hand (pencil). Then I do a complete revision, also long-hand. Essentially I think of myself as a stylist and stylists can become notoriously obsessed with the placing of a comma, the weight of a semi-colon. Obsessions of this sort, and the time I take over them, irritate me beyond endurance.

INTERVIEWER

You seem to make a distinction between writers who are stylists and writers who aren't. Which writers would you call stylists and which not?

CAPOTE

What is style? And "what" as the Zen Koan asks, "is the sound of one hand?" No one really *knows*; yet either you *know* or you don't. For myself, if you will excuse a rather cheap little image, I suppose style is the mirror of an artists's sensibility... more so than the *content* of his work. To some degree all writers have style... Ronald Firbank, bless his heart, had little else, and thank God he realized it. But the possession of style, *a* style, is often a hindrance, a negative force, not as it should be, and as it is... with, say E. M. Forster and Colette and Flaubert and Mark Twain and Hemingway and Isak Dinesen, a reinforcement. Dreiser, for instance, has *a* style—

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but oh, Dio Buono! And Eugene O'Neill. And Faulkner, brilliant as he is. They all seem to me triumphs over strong but negative styles... styles that do not really add to the communication between writer and reader. Then there is the styleless stylist... which is very difficult, very admirable, and *always* very popular: Graham Greene, Maugham, Thornton Wilder, John Hersey, Willa Cather, Thurber, Sartre (remember, we're *not* discussing content), J. P. Marquand and so on. But yes, there *is* such an animal as a nonstylist. Only they're not writers. They're typists. Sweaty typists blacking up pounds of Bond with formless, eyeless, earless messages. Well, who are some of the younger writers who seem to know that style exists? P. H. Newby, Françoise Sagan, somewhat. Bill Styron. Flannery O'Connor... she has some fine moments, that girl. James Merrill. William Goyen... if he'd stop being hysterical. J. D. Salinger... especially in the colloquial tradition. Colin Wilson? Another typist.

INTERVIEWER

You say that Ronald Firbank had little else but style. Do you think that style alone can make a writer a great one?

CAPOTE

No, I don't think so... though, it could be argued: what happens to Proust if you separate him from his style? Style has never been a strong point with American writers. This though some of the best have been Americans. Hawthorne got us off to a fine start. For the past thirty years Hemingway, stylistically speaking, has influenced more writers on a world scale than anyone else. At the moment, I think our own Miss Porter knows as well as anyone what it's all about.

INTERVIEWER

Can a writer learn style?

CAPOTE

No, I don't think that style is consciously arrived at. Anymore than one arrives at the color of one's eyes. After

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all, Your style *is* you. At the end the personality of a writer has so much to do with the work. The personality has to be humanly there. Personality is a debased word, I know, but it's what I mean. The writer's individual humanity, his word or gesture toward the world, has to appear almost like a character that makes contact with the reader. If the personality is vague or confused or merely literary, *ça ne va pas.* Faulkner, McCullers—they project their personality at once.

INTERVIEWER

It is interesting that your work has been so widely appreciated in France. Do you think style can be translated?

CAPOTE

Why not? Provided the author and the translator are artistic twins.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I'm afraid I interrupted you with your short story still in pencilled manuscript. What happens next?

CAPOTE

Let's see, that was second draft. Then I type a third draft on yellow paper, a very special certain kind of yellow paper. No I don't get out of bed to do this... I balance the machine on my knees. Sure, it works fine... I can manage a hundred words a minute. Well, when the yellow draft is finished, I put the manuscript away for a while, a week, a month, sometimes longer. When I take it out again, I read it as coldly as possible, then read it aloud to a friend or two, and decide what changes I want to make and whether or not I want to publish it. I've thrown away rather a few short stories, an entire novel, and half of another. But if all goes well, I type the final version on white paper and that's that.

INTERVIEWER

Is the book organized completely in your head before you begin it or does it unfold, surprising you as you go along?

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CAPOTE

Both. I invariably have the illusion that the whole play of a story, its start and middle and finish, occur in my mind simultaneously—that I'm seeing it in one flash. But in the working-out, the writing—out, infinite surprises happen. Thank God, because surprises, the twist, the phrase that comes at the right moment out of nowhere, is the unexpected dividend, that joyful little push that keeps a writer going.

At one time I used to keep notebooks with outlines for stories. But I found doing this somehow deadened the idea in my imagination. If the notion is good enough, if it truly belongs to *you*, then you can't forget it... it will haunt you till it's written.

INTERVIEWER

How much of your work is autobiographical?

CAPOTE

Very little, really. A little is *suggested* by real incidents or personages, although everything a writer writes is in some way autobiographical. *The Grass Harp* is the only true thing I ever wrote, and naturally everybody thought it all invented, and imagined *Other Voices, Other Rooms* to be autobiographical.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any definite ideas or projects for the future?

CAPOTE

(meditatively) Well, yes, I believe so. I have always written what was easiest for me until now: I want to try something else, a kind of controlled extravagance. I want to use my mind more, use many more colors. Hemingway once said anybody can write a novel in the first person. I know now exactly what he means.

INTERVIEWER

Were you ever tempted by any of the other arts?

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CAPOTE

I don't know if it's art, but I was stage-struck for years and more than anything I wanted to be a tap-dancer. I used to practice my buck-and-wing until everybody in the house was ready to kill me. Later on, I longed to play the guitar and sing in night-clubs. So I saved up for a guitar and took lessons for one whole winter, but in the end the only tune I could really play was a beginners thing called "I Wish I were Single Again". I got so tired of it that one day I just gave the guitar to a stranger in a bus station. I was also interested in painting, and studied for three years, but I'm afraid the fervor, *la vrai chose*, wasn't there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think criticism helps any?

CAPOTE

Before publication, and if provided by persons whose judgment you trust, yes, of course criticism helps. But after something is published all I want to read or hear is praise. Anything less is a bore, and I'll give you fifty dollars if you produce a writer who can honestly say he was ever helped by the prissy carpings and condescensions of reviewers. I don't mean to say that none of the professional critics are worth paying attention to... but few of the good ones review on a regular basis. Most of all, I believe in hardening yourself against opinion. I've had, and continue to receive, my full share of abuse, some of it extremely personal, but it doesn't faze me anymore... I can read the most outrageous libel about myself and never skip a pulsebeat. And in this connection there is one piece of advice I strongly urge: never demean yourself by talking back to a critic, never. Write those letters to the editor in your head, but don't put them on paper.

INTERVIEWER

What are some of your personal quirks?

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CAPOTE

I suppose my superstitiousness could be termed a quirk. I have to add up all numbers: there are some people I never telephone because their number adds up to an unlucky figure. Or I won't accept a hotel room for the same reason. I will not tolerate the presence of yellow roses... which is sad because they're my favorite flower. I can't allow three cigarette butts in the same ashtray. Won't travel on a plane with two nuns. Won't begin or end anything on a Friday. It's endless, the things I can't and won't. But I derive some curious comfort from obeying these primitive concepts.

INTERVIEWER

You have been quoted as saying your preferred pastimes are "conversation, reading, travel, and writing, in that order." Do you mean that literally?

CAPOTE

I think so. At least I'm pretty sure conversation will always come first with me. I like to listen, and I like to talk. Heavens, girl, can't you *see* I like to talk?

—PATI HILL

(This is the seventeenth in a series on the Art of Fiction. Authors interviewed have included E. M. Forster, François Mauriac, Graham Greene, William Styron, Irwin Shaw, Alberto Moravia, Joyce Cary, Ralph Ellison, Georges Simenon, James Thurber, Nelson Algren, William Faulkner, Dorothy Parker, Isak Dinesen and Thornton Wilder.)

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EQUATORIAL

The time of year when all my blood is thick,
This is the season when my heart must die.

Shortly before the noon is always high—
The time of year when all my blood is thick—

The red tongue aches and the slow veins are sick:
This is the season when my heart must die.

Diana's hounds are dead, and she must lie
Hot from the hunt and ill, her body slick,

But not with oil. And in the southern sky
The fires of the roaring summer lick.

Here and in Greece the summer vaults the sky;
Nothing once green is either green or quick;

The time of year when all my blood is thick
Is the short season when my heart must die.

—ROBERT MEZEY

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SUMMERHILL MADHOUSE

I

THE picnic was to be held at the hospital farm. The farm was a mile or two from the red brick buildings on the hospital grounds. There was a dairy, and a barn for the cows. And in this barn, in another section, the draft horses were stabled. These horses were driven onto the nearby fields by worker-patients in the regulation denim trousers and corduroy coats. They accepted ten hours of peonage a day and in return received a pack of tobacco now and then, and "ground parole", the right to wander as they pleased so long as they did not leave the hospital grounds. Below the barn were hen houses, and then there was a large pig stye within a fence of planks. Beyond this was a white three-story house, freshly painted. It was the farm manager's house, and in it Pickering, the farm manager, lived with Mrs. Pickering, three small children ranging downward in age to the youngest, a child of a few months, and several animals, two dogs, a cat, and a small animal kept in a box-like cage by the eldest son. In front of the house was a huge yard of partly-mown wild grass, where, under the shade trees, this eldest boy's pony was staked out to graze. It was on this plot of grass that the picnic was to be held.

The arrangement was that each building was to organize its own group. The patients, cleaned up as much as possible, were to be listed and checked out at the door by an attendant. Then a second attendant, in pressed pants, clean shirt and necktie for the occasion, would marshall them into a squad within the high iron fence outside and police them. This would not be a difficult task, for those likely to run away or disgrace themselves were not allowed to go to the picnic.

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This was the procedure on the Male Side and some such procedure was gone through on the Female Side. There the Female Nursing Head, a hearty, abrupt creature of one hundred and fifty pounds, supervised all that went on, dashing back and forth from building to building in her Ford coupe.

Then at ten o'clock precisely, in the parking circle in front of the Administration Building, where young pink dogwood happened to be in blossom, the patient band struck up. Since the institution was always called Summerhill for the slope of ground crowned with a few spruce trees that lay just behind it, the patient band had styled itself "Summerhill Bughouse Band". "Summerhill Bughouse Band" was printed in huge letters on a large banner that was lifted between two sticks and carried over the heads of the musicians. The great joke of the asylum was that its inhabitants were mad. "Don't mind him, he's crazy," was said a thousand times daily, in precise imitation of the inflection of that phrase so often heard out in life. "Hey, you must be nuts." another usual expression of the outside world was parodied as frequently.

The brassy cacophony of the Summerhill Bughouse Band split the morning. Among the musicians, an individual known as Forty-Eight struck a bass drum. Forty-Eight had won his name when in that year, hearing '48 said so often, he had spoken the first words of his life: "Forty-Eight." He had never learned to say anything else except "Co' da feet." This he said because when, barefooted, in the little denim dress he was given to wear half in kindness and half in joke, he was let outdoors, his feet would get cold, "Co' da feet, co' da feet, co' da feet," he learned to repeat, dancing on his chilled feet. Now he danced in his denim dress behind the bass drum, held before him on the back of another patient. He was a Mongolian idiot hardly five feet tall, with a close-cropped skull waved with ridges as if it had been creased with a hot iron. He thumped the bass drum powerfully, though without rhythm. At this signal, a shambling stream of dowdy women set forth from each of the female buildings. These streams converged, two at a time, till all met at the parking circle. Then the Female Nursing Head, leaning far out the window

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of her Ford, waved a white-sleeved, starch-cuffed arm. "Fooooorward march!" she cried. The band, evidently determined to prove beyond dispute its title to raucity and dissonance, began "Hail Columbia". HAIL!... CoLUMbia... dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, DAH! Through this blare of sound, the bass drum tenaciously pursued a course of its own, repeating steadily: bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum. The procession started in the direction of the Male Side.

At its head marched a proud and cheery man. He was an old Negro known as Snowball who had been a figure around Summerhill for years. Daily, in all weather, his face would appear at the barred building doors and he would enter with the little tray of candy bars, chewing gum and odds and ends he was allowed to sell. His head was perfectly round and but for a fringe of white hair running along the back from ear to ear, and the white, crisp, wispy eyebrows, perfectly black. He was bald and black, and as long as anyone could remember had been known as Snowball. He was always meticulously dressed, pants pressed to a knife edge, shoes mirror-shined, but now, for the picnic parade, he had outdone himself. He wore a cardboard stove pipe hat, fashioned by himself on the model of that worn by Abraham Lincoln, and this hat he had carefully overlaid with bright gold foil. His white linen trousers were tucked into gold foil puttees. And on the back of his linen coat he had stitched two American flags, one above the other.

The band going abandonedly into "God Bless America", Snowball marching almost in goose-step, the parade reached the corner where the male patients waited, and swung off toward the farm. Like brood hens, the matrons shushed and shooed their charges. Matthew, in shirt, corduroy coat and blue denim trousers now, watched them pass. Why were they always so big-hipped? Why did they always have arthritis? Why were their legs, in the white cotton stockings, always thick as clubs? How they demonstrated their motherly efficiency, now that they were being watched! "Now, dear, you must keep in line. A little faster, Ellen... that's a good girl." White, marcelled hair caught in tight nets, keys jangling

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at the ends of the heavy chains around their middles, they waddled busily along. Their charges regarded them, thought Matthew, with a kind of glazed indifference. Tolerance born of custom. The women patients seemed indifferent to the whole proceedings. Though there were the bright little tarts—the "bad girls"—flashing livelily here and there like chips of colored glass in the dun concourse. These mischievous, garish, over-sexed creatures winked mascaraed eyes and pouted carmined lips at the men. Somehow they had procured cosmetics and made themselves up.

And once the picnic area had been reached it was these little gamings who provided the first excitement. Giggling shrilly, squeaking and squealing like so many mice, they scampered into the arms of the less somnambulant of the men. Music had been provided—an automobile with record player and amplifier parked at the edge of the lot, from which issued, amid scratches and electronic howls, antiquated fox trots and drags. Soon couples were hopping jerkily over the ankle-high grass.

It was Dr. King himself, the Chief of Staff, who had ordered the music. A mountainous man in an unpressed brown suit, he stood—thumbs hooked in vest pockets, belly thrust forward—in bemused observation as the dancing progressed. Some of the couples were quite unabashed: they rubbed against each other as they danced in spite of the crowd and open sunlight. The matrons, watching this from the sidelines, shook their heads, frowned, poked one another, and clucked. Dr. King, seeing this, smiled. He had foreseen the behavior both of the patients and the matrons. He was on the side of the patients—and he had gone right ahead and ordered the music.

The pie-eating contest was to be a big feature of the day. A file of contestants was admitted to the roped-off space that surrounded the table on which the pies were placed. Dr. King was in charge. He joked with the patients: kidded them; egged them on. He was playing with hearty, jovial good humor on their sillinesses and idiosyncrasies, making fools of them, setting up first this one and then that as the fool of

–Drawing by Avigdor Arikha

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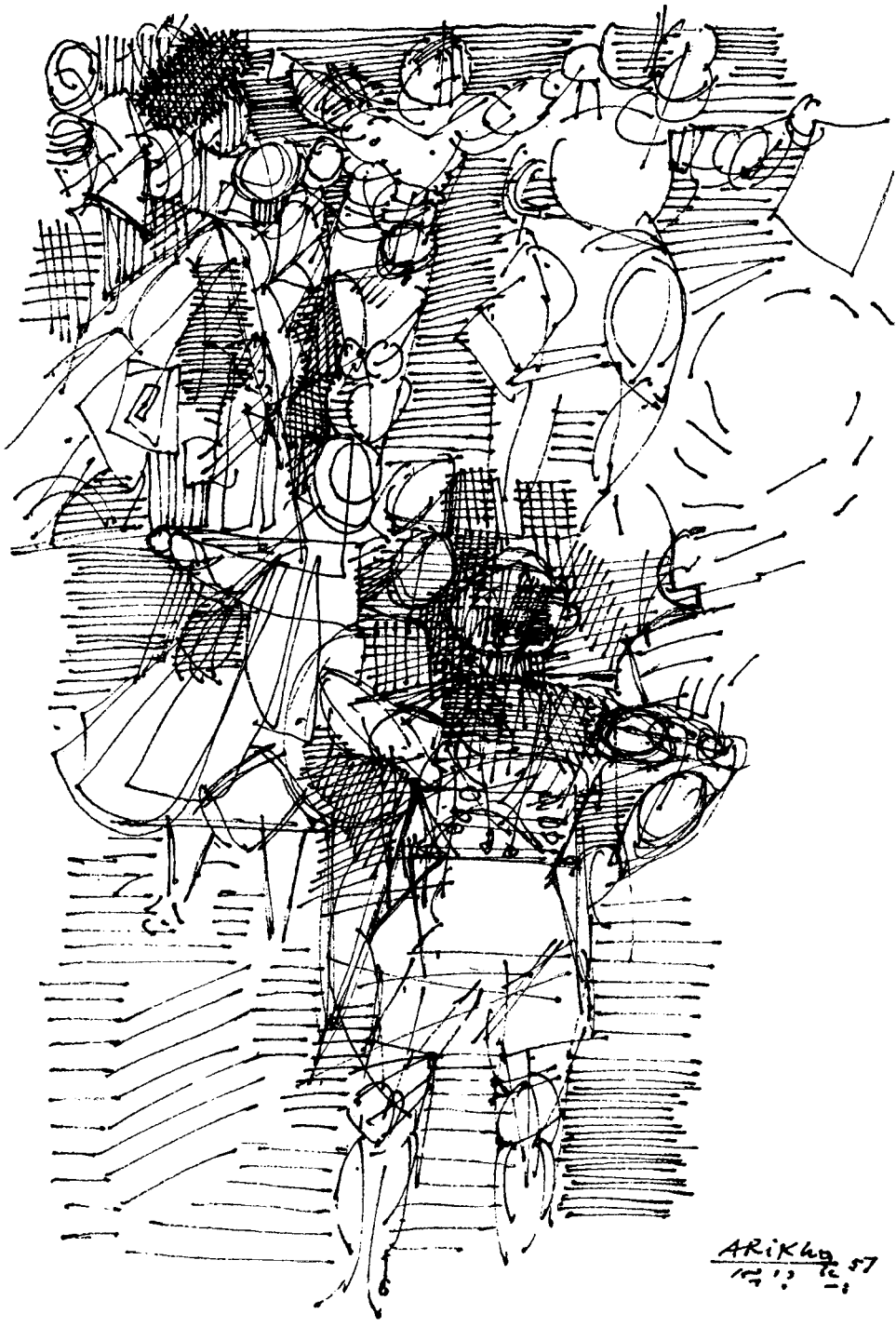

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the moment for the others to laugh at—but this was all good-natured and the patients loved it. Dr. King seemed one of them. And he was having a great time, like a tremendous, playful whale sporting in familiar waters. The sweat stood out on his face and rolled down the creases of his shaven dewlaps. The points of his collar wilted and curled. "Well, Pete, do you think you can get a whole pie into that big mouth of yours?" he shouted. Pete grinned in confusion and shook his head. Laughter, in various pitches and keys, burst from all around the table. Dr. King waved his arms. He really liked the patients.

"All right, all right, all right!" he shouted. He had taken up a stance just outside the rope, ham-like hands on hips, a sort of cleanshaven Henry VIII in disheveled clothes. Legs aparts, little eyes shining out over thick rolls of cheeks, he shouted: "All right everybody—now here's what you do. I'm going to say—Get Ready... Get Set... Go. When I say Go you bend over your pies and get your chops working. But keep your hands behind your back! Nobody is allowed to touch his pie with his hands! Now—are you ready?" A chorus of assent rose around the table—eager eyes looked up at him from figures already half crouched. All around a crowd had gathered; off below the amplifier was squalling, "Oh, they call her frii-volous Sal..." "All right... Get Ready!" shouted Dr. King. The contestants, hands locked behind their backs, bent over the table as low as they dared. They were torn between eagerness and the timidity engendered by institutional life. "Get Set!" The onlookers rose on their toes to see better—the men in denim pants and shirts, the women in the plain gingham dresses that fell straight from shoulder to hem. "Now Jessie Kraus, you black nigger wench," Dr. King interrupted everything to call, waving a sausage-like forefinger in mock, jovial reproof, "you keep your black nose out of that pie till I give the signal!" The fat Negro girl, whose slatternly figure revealed itself forthrightly in the gingham dress, had not, in fact, done anything to warrant this admonition, but she took it jollily, as was intended. "Ah ain't doin' nothin' Doctuh King!"—and her

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fat shook with laughter. "Well, Jessie Kraus, just see that you don't!" cried King. He raised one arm above his head. "All right now. Get Set.... Go!" The arm swept down.

The twenty contestants, half men, half women, eight on a side and two at each end, bent over the table. Their faces disappeared in the blueberry pies, came up now and then, smeared and purple, when they had to breathe. The crowd around had pushed right up against the rope, those in back driving those ahead of them forward—hardly any space divided observers and participants. Dr. King had been borne ahead by the shouting mass. The rope curved inward, displaced by his belly. He didn't care: sweating, puffing, he yelled with the rest.

The great problem of the pie-eaters was to keep their pies in range of their mouths—this toward the end when cleaning up the corners of the pan was important. If you ate toward the right side the pan would sally off to the right, slipping on the smooth board of the table; if you ate left the pan would slide left. What to do about it?—that was the question expressed by the twisting head, the cramping neck and shoulders of each contestant. One of them, who had the misfortune to be at the end of the table, pushed her pan too far, and it tumbled off. "Mary!" Dr. King shouted through the general howl—"pick it up!" It was against the rules but he could not stand to see the girl eliminated.

It could not have been more than five minutes after the end of the pie-eating contest that a woman's screams pierced chillingly the laughter and hubbub. Instantly, all fell silent. Used as they were to screaming women, this sound struck differently on their ears. And, yes, it was not a mad woman who was crying out but one of the sane, though for the first minute she behaved as irrationally as if she were crazy. She ran here and there looking for her husband—when she knew perfectly well, should she but stop and think, that he had to be at the cow barns at this hour.

"Jim! Jim!" she cried, rushing this way and that—and the mad men and mad women made way before her.

"Jim!"

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She had come running out of the house with that one word on her lips. It seemed to be all she could think of. "Jim!" And she rushed into the midst of the picnic, her frantic eyes searching everywhere.

The "Jim" whom she called with such urgency was Jim Pickering, the farm manager. She was his wife; she was mistress of the white farmhouse in front of which the picnic was being held: this smallish woman, still quite young—one of those women you scarcely notice, but if you do happen to look closely surprise you by being a good deal more attractive than you had thought. Her hair was brown; she was dressed in subdued colors. Dr. King, rushing up, caught her by the arm.

"Marian! What's wrong? What's the matter?" When she didn't answer, he gripped her small-boned arm tighter and shook her. Her eyes, startled and incredulous, were a moment focusing on his face. Then suddenly she stopped crying her husband's name and, grasping the lapels of Dr. King's wrinkled, stained brown suit, clung as if drowning.

"What is it? Marian, for God's sake what is it?"

"Timmy... Oh my God, doctor..."

"Marian. What? What about Timmy? Marian..." when she said nothing "...answer me. What about Timmy?"

"He... Oh my God, doctor."

"Marian! Marian!" And he shook her again, and then almost lifted her small form up toward his face, holding her in his big hands.

"I was in the kitchen, doctor. O... please... you're hurting me," she said in the strangely abstracted tone she now suddenly began to employ. And when Dr. King released her she stepped a little back. "I was in the kitchen... Everyone was shouting. Out here, I mean. Oh, I don't know why they were..."

"It was a contest. Pie-eating."

"I see. And they were shouting, so I heard nothing. Oh, nothing, Dr. King," she breathed, and he reached out toward her, because it seemed she was about to collapse. But instead she straightened and said, "I heard nothing. But something—I don't know. I began to think of Timmy,

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upstairs in his Kiddie Koop. Perhaps I did hear something after all, half consciously. And I went up. And Timmy... Tim...my... Well," she got out with a kind of strangling sound in the words, "he was gone. The Kiddie Koop was empty."

Dr. King reacted to this news in a characteristic way. He turned his head and regarded his charges in hurt, mournful reproach. His large, sorry eyes seemed to say... "So this is how you reward my affection for you." But this was only the first instant. Then he recalled that he was Chief of Staff of the institution.

"George," he said, seeing that George Dawes, charge man on the epileptic building, was nearby, "George, I want the men on that side of the yard..." he gestured, "and the women on that side—divided up by buildings. Then I want every charge to check his or her list and see if anybody's missing."

George Dawes, a womanish, innocuous man with hair the color of beach sand, gave a little bobbing nod of the head and ran off to the right, bulgy hips waddling in his ice cream pants. In a moment the patients were separating and moving to one side of the yard or the other, depending on their sex. Most went docilely, accustomed to irrational changes in their irrational world.

The first minute, when Mrs. Pickering had emerged screaming from the house, someone had set off for the barns in search of her husband, and now, red-necked, sleeves rolled up, lengths of straw still clinging to his work pants, he broke into the central group. "Jim! Oh, Jim!" his wife cried, and tried to fasten herself to him—but he thrust her impatiently aside, perhaps only out of habit. It was clear he did not know what to think or do. Evidently he had picked up a garbled account along the way.

"Whad happened? What's happened? Where's Timmy?"

But when Dr. King told him what had happened he only stood staring into the big man's face. Red-necked, angular, he had a reputation for the speed and inexorability of his decisions. He had blustered the farm personnel into line—subdued and silenced and broken the spirit of the rather

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chipper little woman he had married. Yet now he had not a word to say. Miss Peterson, the Female Nursing Head, at the instigation of Dr. King, began to blow her whistle. The short-bobbed woman sent blast after blast into the air. The separating patients hurried faster. And, away off along the road, motorcycles were gunned with sudden explosions. In a moment the state police assigned to watch outside the grounds on the day of the picnic appeared on roaring motors. They came skidding around the turn below, the first in the clear but his fellows in a screen of dirt; they jounced and sprang up the lane along the edge of the yard. Most of the patients stood still to observe this new sensation and the attendants had to start them up afresh. The police drew up, braking their cycles with swerving flourishes. "A baby has been kidnapped," Dr. King told their officer in blue uniform and neat leather puttees. And King added what few details he knew. The officer nodded briskly at the end of each sentence Dr. King spoke, and when King finished he saluted sharply off the brim of his cap. Then he and his fellows walked quickly in a little knot to their cycles, then gunned, then roared off, the grim looks on their firm-fleshed, weathered, well-fed faces making it clear that no damned looney was going to escape the confines of the squat rectangle of hospital land.

So then the next thing to do was to comb the farm. For this job there were the hospital guards and those male attendants who could be spared from the corraling, overseeing and segregating of the patients. A party was formed and soon started off, going up to the end of the lane and turning right beyond the hen coops. Dr. King, striding, puffing, the red creeping layer by layer up his neck and chins, had placed himself at its head. He did not approve of violence in mental hospital work. He had stood out against the tide and after twenty years did not concede its necessity. There was a kind of communication he could not explain, he said. A psychic communication. Violence called up violence. So he believed. It was the incipient violence that was always born of fear, in the mind of the attendant or guard that evoked violence

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in the patient; that caused the violent attack. For hadn't he, alone, over many years, gone among every type of patient, and never been so much as threatened? In the war... the order for a practice blackout had once gone without warning from the nearby city, and men at the power stations had thrown switches, darkening the city and all the hamlets and farms around. The whole hospital had suddenly gone black. And King had been in the restraint room of the violent ward. In the blackness he had felt himself grabbed with strong hands, and had thought "Well, now, hm... my theory wasn't so good after all." But a thickish voice, that of Abe, a physical giant, a manic, had said in his ear, "Stick with me, boss. Ain't nothin' gonna happen to you, boss, if one a these guys here should get funny." But none of the guys had gotten funny. They'd all been of a mind with Abe. And it had always been so. Still, there were times when he had to close his eyes. Had to! Now... as he said nothing, as the little knot of hunting men hurried along, clubs began to appear in the hands of the guards. Short, weighted clubs. And he could say nothing. Because it was too early to see how things would go. A child had been kidnapped: a sick man must be hunted down. A sick man who had been entrusted to his charge. Might as well beat a poor devil for having scarlet fever as for being crazy!... King thought with a flash of anger. A madman menaced society? So did a man with scarlet fever! But a madman was to be hunted down. On such a hunt men carried clubs. And he... thought King... he would lead them. He was not a man. He was Chief of Staff of the institution.

As they neared the low, red barns, the party was brought to a sudden halt. An attendant had found something off to one side. He carried it extended in front of him into the group. It was a white garment, a bit of white he had seen among the weeds by the fence. It was a strange, complicated little garment. It was a creation of Mrs. Pickering's. It had a hole at the neck, and then was stitched up all around, like a bunting. But it wasn't a bunting. There was an involved arrangement of strings at the top, and the purpose of the whole was to keep a child placed within it in place in bed.

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It kept a child from slipping under the sheets and smothering. Timmy had been in it when put into his Kiddie Koop.

The white bit of flannel struck every man's heart. The hunt became personal in a way it had not been until now. The cloth, in the hands of the man who held it, looked so shapeless, so empty. Someone took it from the attendant as if to examine it but then, at the feel of the fabric, only stood holding it, looking strangely thoughtful.

It was the father who was moved to the forefront of action by the discovery. He greeted the discovery of the garment with the same puzzled expression, the same unbelief and indecision, with which he had received the initial news from Dr. King. His brows drew together and he sucked in his cheeks at the sides of his raw-boned face. But then his nature seemed to split within him. He remained, if anything, more remote, more stunned and cut off than before—yet at the same time, as if automatically, his old staccato, commanding voice began to speak through his numbed lips. He gave harsh, urgent orders, ignoring Dr. King. And Dr. King dropped back, and did not intercede. Rapidly, Pickering, the whole lay-out of the farm in his mind as a living map, deployed the forces. The place was to be scoured, the groups starting at the outskirts and working inward, so that, like the jackrabbits in those hunts out on the prairies, the quarry would be driven to the center. The rabbits, when finally trapped, were beaten to death with flail-like sticks. If some such image was in Dr. King's mind he said nothing.

King's detail was to search the cow barns. King at the head, they went through the long, low swinging gate and down through the yard strewn with scraps of silage. Even the suspense and emotionalism of the moment could not impart to Dr. King fear of a madman, any more than any genuine wrath. Such things were foreign to his nature. He opened the double-sectioned door at the back of the cow barn and walked in. His hands were empty. He had no cudgel. It did not occur to him to glance around. He walked straight in, and three others, gripping clubs, followed nervously behind. It seemed that the long, narrow area was

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empty—save, of course, for the cows. There was the spicy, fermented smell of silage; the hot smell, as of loaves baking, from the fresh dung. And the smell of the warm, milky animals. They stood or lay, necks in the horizontal metal clasps. And some stirred, thinking they were to receive an early milking. But the men passed and they subsided. It was drowsily peaceful in the barn—the air warmed by the bodies of the animals. At the far end were two small closed-off rooms. To the left was the tool room. Its door hung an inch open. Looking in, Dr. King saw, in the semi-darkness, the sharpened spades hung up on brackets, the sheaves of pitchforks, the cleansed milk buckets. All was spotless and in order. Pickering, if a martinet, got results. The room to the right for the use of milkers and field men. A small window let in the light. At the far end was a water faucet and a greenish, corroded iron trough. Here the men could wash their hands, the waste running off down the trough to one of the floor sewers in the main part of the barn. There was a telephone on a small table. Over it, Pickering had hung up ruled charts on which he had written out work schedules in a strangely cramped and indrawn hand. The lines were spidery. In the middle of the room was a small coal stove. In the winter the men could group around it and get warm. Dr. King pushed the door further open and entered the room. It was slumberous, quiet—there were motes of dust in the light that came in through the window. Then King noticed that the sections of stove pipe, up near the ceiling, no longer joined. One black segment thrust straight down from above, but the other, the long, upreaching segment, pointed off a little. King's eyes moved slowly down this length of pipe. The saucer of stove lid was slightly tilted, the polished handle veered like a tipped mast. And then he saw that there was on the black, gracefully bellying side of the stove, just above the steel apron, a mark of red. Not much: the blood had not dripped. But, scanning the floor deliberately, then moving like a guided automaton to the coal box, he found the little body, just in a diaper, the skull, still soft with babyhood, smashed in. "Holy Jesus," a man behind him said in a whisper.

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But King, not turning, in a voice that was perfectly normal and controlled in every way, except that it was not in the least his own, said: "It must have been taken by the feet and swung against the side."

When Pickering came into the little room, the others silently falling back, the child's body had not been moved. And he simply sank down beside it without a sound, fluidly, as though melting. There was something horrible about this boneless collapse of the hitherto tyrannical man. He did not weep, said nothing—merely sat on the floor as though staggered, as though drunk—his arms, like those of a mother about a cradle, encircling the box in which his dead baby lay. He leaned heavily on his arms. His head sagged down.

And the hurt of this sight had to be eradicated from all who saw it. There was just one way. There was just one way. They had to get the dirty bastard who had done it. *They had to get that dirty bastard!* No man spoke these words—had he done so he would have said them hissingly from between his teeth, with a sound indistinguishable from the hiss through the lips of men making love. But no one spoke. They stood silent, growing inexorably toward the moment when, the fascination of the tableau at the coal box releasing them, they would turn, first one, then another, and then another... and they would stream out the door. Dr. King stood motionless. Would he oppose them? But, as he stood, lethargy seemed to seep into his great bulk. A battle seemed to wage within him, and cease, all in a moment, and leave him a scuttled hulk, to drift with the current. He ought to be a more compact, centralized, a leaner man. But he was not. He was huge, protozoan; exposed by his vast sheath of skin to every sensibility. Just now, when he needed them, why did his convictions waver? Why must his beliefs, which ought to be simple, be laced through with contradictions? How could he be himself, and these men around him too? Why did life have to be complex, changing—why must it be faceless? And he—spread through it all, himself so huge! In the very pith of his flesh something was slowly freezing. When they found

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the man who had done this deed... would he stop a blow? Or give one?

George Dawes, the charge man on the epileptic ward, came rushing in, disarrayed and breathless, carrying a corduroy patient's coat in his hands. He gasped a moment, wiped a handkerchief over his face—then gave his news. The patients had been separated by buildings, checked and counted. One—just one—was missing. One of the most trusted. You never knew. Matthew Clavick. Here—he extended it—was Clavick's coat. But Clavick himself could not be found.

II

That steeple printed against the sky... It was toward it that he must make his way. He did not know why. Once in New Mexico, long before anyone had ever called him crazy, in the days when it was they who were crazy, when they still thought him Christ, he had walked out-of-doors of an afternoon, and suddenly something had seemed to snap. It was as if the cord of memory, which is all that binds one to oneself, had for an instant parted. He had opened his eyes on the floating ochre of the New Mexican desert, across which black mesas loomed like islands, and, looking down

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at the robed and sandaled body within which he found himself, had asked: "Who is this?" Who was he? Who in all truth was he? He did not know. And he had begun to walk, his back to whatever had been his life. He did not look around. It was the month of October and a little cool wind ran like silver through the mid-afternoon heat of the sun. It shook the gold leaves on the cottonwoods like so many coins. In an arroyo the sumach was scarlet. He noticed these things with new-opened eyes, walking on. Far off, the foothills bore the first light snow of the season. Falling among the dark spines of the trees, it had made an effect as of silver fox—a mingling. But Taos Mountain was, at the crown, pure white. It loomed up, white, white, against the vivid blue of the sky. It was toward the mountain that he thought he was walking. At its base lived and worked the changeless Indians, moving always with their strange, stoic, furtive grace. They were like a current of water running through an alien land—a land so transformed that only its raw earth and rude mountains resembled the land they had known. Corn growers, basket weavers—still—today! And it was to these people, to their sacred mountain, that he thought he was going. Yet suddenly before him was the little wooden church, its steeple thrust up against the white of the mountain. He stopped and went inside. There it was that, hours later, Paul had found him, not praying, merely sitting—as if asleep. Paul had touched his shoulder; he had risen and followed.

Now it was spring. The bank, newly green, curved down, and, descending it, he came near the stream. There were some tiny white flowers he could not name, lost like little dim stars in the grass. There were wood violets where the shade was heavy. He plucked one. It had no scent. The trees were just coming into leaf, the tender leaves only just unscrolling. Across the stream, through the trees, was a splash of blossom like a captive cloud. An apple orchard? Bees hummed in the air. And then against their droning sounded, from a little way off, a shrill whistle, repeated many times. In answer, there broke upon the quiet an explosion of motors, and then a roar. Along the damp stream edge near at hand there was

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movement, a rustle and splash. Was it a muskrat?—disturbed by his presence?—or the noise of the cycles? The whistling and roaring was because of the missing child, he knew. He had heard the first details, that a child had been taken, before slipping away. And then, at all the confusion, at the excitement that seemed to vibrate in the air, he had become elated. He had just gone away across the yard, not so much as stopping to take up his coat from where he had placed it on the grass, and nobody had noticed him, and he had found a place where the bottom hedge opened: there was a ditch, and then a road. And he had vaulted the ditch. And pushed his way through a thicket. And down to this stream.

He was going toward something, not running away. But what was this something that drew him on? Matthew frowned. He was not sure he knew. Somehow... it was the church. He had lost sight of it now, and he plunged ahead. The stream, partly dammed, formed a little pond, which he crossed on the fallen log that helped to dam it. Then he climbed the bank to the railroad trestle. And now, again, he could see the church. Like the little church in Taos, so very like it. He could see the church, and in the other direction he could see the farm. And the one was quiet, while the other... in front of the three-storied white house at the farm, everyone, sane and insane, was clotted together, moving and turning, like a colony of ants whose hill, all unexpectedly, has been overturned. The motorcycles were bounding along the road. And then Matthew saw emerge, from the lower end of the cow barn, a stealthy figure. The man worked along the inside of the fence below the barn, then circled the silo, then approached the lane that ran along the yard below the farmhouse. He dropped to the ground behind the line of hedge as the police on their cycles came into the lane. Then when the police had passed and everyone had turned to where they were dismounting, he slipped through the hedge and crossed the lane. It was Charley Anderson. Matthew knew him well. "He hasn't the child," he said to himself. Anderson was without the child. Matthew, knowing him, knew what that meant. He watched to see what Anderson

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would do. Anderson slipped across the lane and merged with the male patients who stood in a group. Matthew watched a little longer. But nothing happened. Anderson was lost among the others.

The church, as Matthew reached it, was deserted. It was a little country church, sleeping in the midweek quiet. Only on Sunday, or when someone married, or when someone died, would it bestir itself. There brooded over it an air of peace. Huge oaks shaded it, rising, great-trunked, from behind the field-stone wall that separated it from the road. Field stones had been used in the building too. Blocks of rough-hewn granite formed the porch; the sides, rising up, were of gray, flecked granite. Above this was the wooden upper-structure, painted white and pierced by windows of amber glass. One window only, in pretty colors, depicted the scene of the nativity of Christ. And yet this window foretold the future of the others. For gradually, as finances permitted, others of the plain windows would be removed and replaced by sacred scenes in pretty colors. Thus, with the passage of time, the church would grow.

The front doors of the church were closed but unlocked. Matthew entered, shutting the doors again behind him. There was a dreaming dimness about the place, a church on a week day is outside time. The very air was enclosed, dry, faintly peppery to the nostrils. A footfall up the aisle echoed and reechoed. There was a little pump organ and, going to it, Matthew thoughtfully depressed one note. A wisp of sound was expelled by the exhausted bellows—all the breath left from last Sunday's service. The light in the musty auditorium was amber. There was the contrast of the lone stained glass window. It alone let in varicolored light. And looking up at it Matthew began to smile. He smiled, and in a moment one gaunt hand, like a bundle of faggots, lifted, and with two curled fingers he plucked at his beard, just with the foreknuckles. And all the while he was looking up at the window of stained glass. The Nativity... Ah. The window showed Mary, the Child, the adorers around. And, looking at it, Matthew thought of Dolcine, that amazing woman,

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who had been Holy Mother, and Angel of the Annunciation too!, to his messiahship. "If I had gone through with it..." he said aloud, and his voice ran around the church and spent itself somewhere in the shadows. "If I had gone through with it... what then? Not this." He looked down at his hospital clothes. Here he stood, a kind of lunatic, scarecrow Christ. On Golgotha. Golgotha? But he had been going toward something, toward something, since he had left the picnic ground. Toward...? "If," said Matthew, again aloud, and again his voice went around the room and died, "I had not renounced myself... For surely the first step was taken when, that day when I, the sole sane human being there, denied I was Christ. That was the first step in this direction."

The sole sane human being there? Sometimes he had thought he was the sole sane human being on the face of the earth. How they longed for a Saviour! A leader! A master! Everyone in the world! And Matthew, stung with thought, paced swiftly up the empty church aisle. With what passion, with what willingness to blind themselves, they looked for Christ! And it had seemed to him sometimes, when they were gathered around him, and when the light came down on the New Mexican desert and stirred in him his irrepressible sense of life, that they would take anything he offered, any crumb, that they would accept and believe anything and rejoice in so doing, if he would take from them their responsibility, and give them back the immortality that—in their faithlessness—they had lost. They wanted to live forever—and could not bear the pain of charting the day-to-day course of their lives! And he had thought "Oh, humanity! Oh, humanity!" —with such anguish that suddenly he had begun to laugh. That had been just after Paul had found him in the Taos church. His mind had cleared, and he had begun to laugh. Paul had looked at him, struck by the queerness of the sound. "Paul," he had said, "1898, Chicago, and my father, and Ramakrishna away off in India." "What? What?" asked Paul. "You know," Matthew said, "it's a crazy lie. A crazy lie. That I am Christ."

And they had walked on—the young man in riding

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breeches, boots and sombrero, and Matthew in white linen robes and sandals, until they had come to a shady lane leading off the road, and there, turning in, they had found themselves in the graveyard of Taos. They went on and reached a grave enclosed within an iron fence. "Crockett," said Paul. And this was the first word spoken for many minutes. They stood by the grave of Davy Crockett, and in a moment Matthew drew a little back from Paul, with a curiously risible expression on his face. "In 1898," he said, "my father went to Chicago. It was the first time he had ever been out of the county of his birth, and it was the last. He went not for the city of pleasure and sin itself, but to the religious congress held in connection with the Columbian Exposition. Vivekananda came to that congress, Paul, and he told it that an incarnation of the Christ was alive—a being, Ramakrishna, imbued with the breath of God, alive and on the earth, at that moment, in 1898! He stampeded the congress. All the former Christs, that had become legends, were forgotten. Paul," said Matthew, "Dolcine was there."

Paul looked up, but did not speak.

"She was thirty-eight. She had seen and done it all. She has told me—with her amazing conviction—how it happened that she went to Chicago. She had the contempt for riches and beauty only a woman born rich and beautiful can have. And one day she had come upon, in 'The Imitation Of Christ', the passage about... 'others who, illuminated in their understandings, purged in their affections, pant after things eternal. And despise earthly things, and long for heavenly things, and neglect this earth for high heaven.' And was she not purged in her affections? And was it not nice to think that she was illuminated in her understandings? So she would pant after things eternal. And she went to the congress. And she met my father, Paul, a simple dirt farmer. And that might have been all—except that he said something she never forgot. They met at a tea and talked about Ramakrishna, as everyone around them was doing, and Dolcine had many very fine things to say. But father said only: 'I like the story of it. I mean, the story. How when he was in the

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temple where his brother was the priest and he went in and laid down in the idol's lap to prove he was God. He wasn't scared of that idol. And he was only a tyke. And he played in the village just like any other tyke. But then he went off sometimes where they burn the bodies the way they do down there in India. And he had another life. And God talked to him. He learnt that way. Not from books. God's in the world. He ain't in books.'

"That evening, Paul, Dolcine sat in the grand apartment she had rented on the Gold Coast and she had what she would have called a pipe dream up till then. She saw Ramakrishna walking in the crematory near his village, with the light of God burning in his brow. Then she remembered what Vivekananda had said of the Bombay actor—the rich, popular actor who had followed Ramakrishna, but who had stayed on the fringe of the movement, busy with his own affairs. But how one day in a garden in Bombay the actor was there when Ramakrishna walked among the disciples. And how the light came on Ramakrishna's brow, and all fell to their knees, because the spirit of God had come to them directly. And how the actor sprang to his feet with a cry of joy, and all the false masks of a thousand impersonations were struck from him. And he was his real self... naked to the air, with the brown earth under his feet. Then it happened, Paul, that Dolcine began to think of my father. A plain man—whose red hands had told her a story. Whose red hands were calloused from working the earth. And she seemed to feel how he knelt to the earth, and how a pulse beat from his hands into the earth, and something flowed from the earth to him through his hands. He had said God was in the world. He had meant God was actual, like a tree or a stone.

"That might have been all. But years later Dolcine loved finally, Paul, after many men. And then the man was killed in a skiing accident before her eyes. She's told me about it. How she touched him. It was cold, and his breath could be seen. And she touched him. And just then, she says, his last breath went from him like a little smoke. She saw it vanish.

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And she has told me how she stood alone in the silence and looked out over the white wastes of snow, where the mountains seemed to push back the edge of the world, and make it huge, till the world had expanded into a new dimension around her. It was then, left all alone, that she understood that an incarnation of Christ was alive in the world. Months passed, and she came to my father's farm..."

The rest was known. To Paul. To the world. How Dolcine had taken him and brought him up, himself believing he was an incarnation of the Christ for so long. Then had come the terrible day—the day he renounced himself. The disciples, their hearts struck stone-cold in their breasts, unable to look at one another, unable to tolerate the presence of each other. And so they had walked away onto the New Mexican desert, first one, and then the next, in their riding breeches, and their buckskin frontier jackets with bearskin lapels and fringe, and their Stetson sombreros.

That was high noon—and not till the sun was almost down in Arizona had the first come back. But he had come running back! And on his own authority, without permission, he had rushed up into the bubble atop the central adobe of the colony and begun to ring the bell. And at the sound they had all come streaming from over the desert. And the man who had rung the bell and hailed them home told them his great thought. Jesus the Christ had been a heretic! Heretic against Jewish faith and Roman law! The divine soul always broke from the ordered way! Always the Divine One had to smash the walls of usage—of cold usage—to let the rays of God shine in!

And they had sought Matthew and brought him before them and told him what they had come to understand.

"No, that is all wrong," Matthew said after a while.

They all began to speak at once, trying to make it clear to him.

And he stood before them in his linen robes, his hair to his shoulders, his bearded chin on his breast, and watched them as they moved and shouted and proclaimed truths all around him, with a slumberous, brooding, dark light in his eyes.

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"No," he said quietly after a while, "I am not Christ."

"He denies it! Do you see?" A triumphant glance went around the faces of the group. "And thus proves himself!" the speaker cried. The group crowded in, flaming with feeling.

"No, no. This tortures me. Leave me. I am not Christ."

"Oh, the Christ soul exploring for the higher truth! Oh, the tormented soul of Christ!"

He left them—tortured—and went out into the desert to be free of them and be alone. And he stood in the cold moonlight that burned whitely off the whole desert, and he saw how blackly the buttes laid down their shadows, and he saw Taos Mountain, a white cloud in the vault, and saw all the crackling stars above the land moving toward winter. In the glory of the night, he began to laugh.

After that he did not deny himself as Christ again. For a week or two he did nothing at all save wait, and all went on seemingly as before. Then, very mildly, he told Dolcine one morning he felt the thrall of the colony too close upon him. He was too cared for here. He must have his agony in the desert, as Jesus had had. Dolcine granted her permission, deeply moved.

So he had gone a little way into the desert, but not so far they would not come out and visit him and see what he would do. And he cleared a space and put down a sort of floor of chips from the piñon pine. Then he went from bar to bar in Taos, and to the three of four hotels, begging beer bottles. These bottles he broke, retaining only the bottoms, and he returned home.

They came from the colony to watch him, as, cementing the beer bottle bottoms together with clay, he erected, over his floor of pinon scraps, a kind of dome. They watched him, but did not speak, and he did not speak to them, busy as he was with work, He finished his bottle-bottom igloo, and still no one had said a word. He looked at them gravely from time to time, but did not laugh—until, with darkness, they had gone.

But then he would sit outside his igloo with his back to

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the wall of bottle bottom glass and his head thrown back and his beard point jutted out like a spearhead from the shadow of his chin upon the moon-white earth and send his laughter out over the desert like the yowls of a coyote until he would be strangling with love of life and mirth!

He acquired a goat, and named it Vivi, though he never disclosed the reason for this. But when he and the goat were alone in the igloo he would call his companion Vivekananda. He began to live solely by the milk of the goat. Then when Dolcine and the others begged him to reconsider, as he was growing wan and weak, he asked their pardon. "I see that I have been too rigorous," he said. "I thank you for your concern." And thereafter he consented to consume not only the milk of the goat but also whatever the goat would eat. The goat his arbiter, he ate strange growths.

When winter had descended as low as the desert he left his igloo and returned to the colony, announcing that his passion in the desert was through. And after a while he let Vivi go too, and he lived almost normally again. For life had become a kind of radiant glory to him, and he did not want to freeze or starve to death. Back in the colony he had no trouble inventing whole sheaves of new tricks. And then he hit upon the scheme of laying down proscripts. He began to proscribe everything he could think of they liked to do. And the way they took to that, and seemed to enjoy it, was the most fun of all. He began to prophesy and preach, and one day he edged a little beyond his plan. He went into Taos and preached and prophesied there. From Taos he travelled east.

III

And so here he was, an insane asylum internee.

With a caper that sent sound rattling around the church auditorium like a pebble in a wooden box, that threw a spangling of dust through the amber columns of light that seemed rising toward the panes of the windows, he jumped into the air. Eyes shining in holes of sockets, he

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strode back up the aisle. There was a stairs to the right. He took the steps three at a time. *Was he crazy?* He was happy!—happy!—in a wicked world!—happy in the pit of filth where he plucked like withered fruit the dry days of his life! What was it in him that denied knowledge, that denied the little cynical smile of the mind, denied the very evidence of the senses when it must—and, all oblivious, swelled joyously up? Oh, the joy of life!

A last flight of narrow, rickety steps carried him up into the bell loft of the church. The bell hung just over his head, the crossbar whitened by the droppings of pigeons. A feather still tipped and tipped down the air. Birds had been frightened away by his entrance. Through the gratings he could see out over the country all around. There was Summerhill, the hill itself, with its spruces. And in front of it the asylum, with its red brick buildings and pretty grounds, a sore that, festering inward, could yet appear healed over. And in the other direction Matthew saw the farm. The stir had hushed there. He saw the patients being herded along the road back toward confinement, their finest day of the year cut short. The farm itself was deserted and silent. No living being was to be seen anywhere around. The police, whose cycles had coughed on the roads, seemed to have vanished.

But then Matthew heard the coughing of the cycles—and looking again he saw the cycles, little as toys, moving between the checkered gameboard squares of the new-ploughed fields. And then he saw a kind of flash of something down in the woods. The flash recurred. And then he knew the flashes were men passing among the trees. He studied the flashes: the men were moving toward the church.

In a moment the cycles had grown large. The police arrived below in the road, each uniformed, putteed man checking his cycle and leaning to the side, a leg out to brace him. The one among them to whom the others seemed to defer pointed toward the church, toward the farm across the woods, and then back to the church. And then a man dismounted and wheeled his cycle along to the field-stone wall, against which he leaned it. He started toward the

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opening through the wall, where the path began that led to the front door of the church. Matthew watched him as he walked swiftly on, then stopped abruptly just as he passed the wall. He looked quickly both ways along the inside of the wall, and as he did so reached back a hand. This hand, Matthew saw, rested on some object it was difficult to make out from above. But then when the police officer turned to see if there might be anyone behind the shed at the cemetery edge, in which tools and fragments of broken tombstones were kept, Matthew saw that the object at the man's hip was a holstered gun. This gun seemed very real, a very great deal realer than he would have thought. And it occurred to Matthew that all he needed to do was go quietly down, and tell them about Charley Anderson. He would just explain, and it would be all right. He started for the stairs that descended from the loft on the impetus of this thought. And he checked himself. Because he realized that, in their heat, they might not believe him. At least not soon enough. And he glimpsed another prompting, subtly masked, compelling him to go below.

He went back to the grating, and looking down saw that the other police had not dismounted, and he realized that it was more than likely that the one who had would look only as far as the church auditorium. Finding no one there, he would return to his cycle.

Matthew heard, in a moment, the slap, slap, slap of the officer's feet as he walked into the auditorium below. And soon the steps went back out; and the church door was heard to open and close; and the officer appeared once again out-of-doors and started for his motorcycle. The officer had gone perhaps half the distance to his cycle when there was a commotion in the woods, much closer than the flashes of men among the trees a few moments ago. This commotion was caused by the fact that the men whose forms Matthew had seen among the trees had now reached a grove of birches, and these birches were spaced widely up along the slope that rose to the road in front of the church. The men were scrambling up this slope, beginning to appear among

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the sparse birches. And then Matthew saw the low, ranging forms that moved ahead of the men, and hearing their baying, knew them for hounds. And he saw Dr. King at the head of the men—and saw, in Dr. King's hands, his own corduroy patient's coat. He had had to fight down a need to go below a moment ago. How was it that in a joyous life he had longed to rush down and throw himself on the fury of the men? How could it be? How could there be this double passion, gigantically large, to die wildly, to live in this crazy world? The hounds below began suddenly a keened, excited yapping. He looked down and saw them, streaming, ranging no longer, nearing the path to the church.

●

CALL UP

Dig that tomb
Where our kin
Rest their swords
Till we beat
The alarm.
And all people
Must shoulder
Father to son,
Son to father,
Prince of the house
And Jack rise,
Saddle and ride
Down the ranks.

—JOHN FAIRFAX

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NARCISSUS

Water, with lidless stare,
Invites a cool surmise,
Holds there his curious eyes,
Blind with the mid-day glare
  And false surprise.

The depths are yet opaque,
Because the glassy shelf
Returns him to himself,
Pure surface like the lake;
  Self cries to self.

He moves, and sun floods through,
The liquid vaults run clear.
Color is shadow here,
Thin azure and deep blue,
  Like sudden fear.

The silent depths disclose
With radiant pretence
A purer ambience
Than anything he knows,
  Bright innocence.

Calmly, the surface burns.
Intense, preoccupied,
Not pausing to decide,
He cleaves the russet ferns
  And moist bank-side,

Childlike and golden-thighed,
Sensuous, yet all too pure,
Impatient to secure
What life could not provide
  Nor love endure.

—CHARLES GULLANS

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CHRISTOPHER RAND

BUDDHA'S ANNIVERSARY

THE twelve months ending in May, 1957, are counted as the 2500th year of the Buddhist Era, and they have been a holy occasion for the millions of Buddhists in Asia. The big moment was last year at the May full moon, a time that is always celebrated as the triple anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and departure from this world. Preparations for that day began in many places as early as 1955, and in February of '56—being in New Delhi—I decided to learn more about them by visiting the Ganges Plain of North India, which can be called the Holy Land of Buddhism, as of Hinduism. The main Buddhist shrines in that region are Lumbini, where the Buddha is said to have been born 2580 years ago; Buddhagaya, where He became enlightened at the age of 35; Sarnath, where He preached His first sermon right afterward; and Kusinara, where He passed from this life, or entered Nirvana, at the age of 80. The places I visited were Sarnath and Buddhagaya, which are near main railways and hence easy to get to—not only for myself but for the many Buddhist pilgrims who visit India yearly and help to build the shrines up.

I began with Sarnath, which, as the scene of the first sermon (preached to five Indian ascetics in a deer park), is looked on as the birthplace of the Buddhist religion. Sarnath is four miles outside of Benares, the holy city of the Hindus, and the conjunction of the two places is held, by many, to enhance the holiness of both. Sarnath itself is in quiet country —open fields with small villages dotted among them—and the land extends flat to the horizon in all directions there. The road out from Benares is lined nearly all the way with

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green mango trees; there must be thousands of them. It is a narrow road, but I found that it was being widened for the big year—a good thing, I would say, as there was then room for little more than a single auto on the pavement, and the other traffic there—pedestrians, bullock-carts, bicycles etc.—kept being elbowed into the ditch. At several places along the way I saw workmen putting down a foundation layer of bricks for the new road, and getting ready to lay dirt, ballast and macadam on top of this. The work didn't seem very far along, but there were hundreds of men on the job, and I didn't doubt that thousands more could be added if need be—manpower is rarely a problem in India.

There is no town or village at Sarnath; not even a small bazaar; just a cluster of monuments, temples and other institutions amid the rustic scene. (During my visit I stayed at a Benares hotel, making trips to Sarnath in the daytime.) The chief Sarnath monument is a partly ruined stupa, or dome-crowned Buddhist tower, of yellowish stone, more than a hundred feet high; it was built about 400 A.D. and has some lovely carvings round it—floral designs and arabesques —half worn away. Near it are the ruins of two ancient monasteries, and not far away is a tower built by the great emperor Akbar in 1588 A.D., on the remains of a stupa built before Christ by the equally great Asoka. The other structures are modern, including a museum built by the British; a temple built by a Buddhist organization called the Maha Bodhi ("Great Enlightenment") Society; a Chinese Buddhist temple; a school and library, also run by the Maha Bodhi Society; and a hostel given by the Birlas, the Indian millionnaire family that supported Gandhi so copiously. This settlement has been well cared for in the Twentieth Century, but I found it was now being spruced up further. Much new building had started, for one thing—new hostel space here and there and new dormitories, or classrooms, for the Maha Bodhi school. Big stacks of brick were lying about, and brick walls were already going up, with pole scaffoldings beside them. Some women were polishing a smooth stone wall before the Maha Bodhi temple—rubbing it with other stones

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and water till it fairly shone. And much landscaping was in progress: new grading; new flower-beds; new rock-gardens round some clumps of bamboos; new waterpipes running over the lawn. Water—the key to North Indian landscape effects—was plainly not being spared there in B.E. 2500; it was being piped everywhere to make for a lush green background, and dozens of Indian laborers were taking advantage of it. Two or three dozens were even transplanting a lawn, the first time I had seen such an operation. Grass, torn up by its roots elsewhere, was being brought to them in big baskets by other laborers; and they were putting it into the ground plant by plant, making holes for it with knifelike tools. Fifty yards away I found more dozens of workers digging a moat, and beside it a pen was being made from high wire fencing. A guide who showed me round Sarnath one afternoon said that deer would be kept in this enclosure during the festivities, to heighten the deer-park impression. This guide also said that the Indian government was spending thirty or forty lakhs of rupees—almost a million dollars—to fix Sarnath up. I could well believe him, remembering the road and looking round at the scene now. Laborers were everywhere in it, their tools working noiselessly in the soft earth. The winter sun beat down on them pleasantly, and a breeze rustled the trees.

The Maha Bodhi Temple at Sarnath, built in this century on old Buddhist lines, contains a remarkable set of frescoes, done by a Japanese artist, depicting the Buddha's life. The scores of figures in the frescoes have Indian faces, but they have been painted in a Japanese style that is almost grotesquely dramatic. It gives them a special vividness, which is reinforced by the fact that you are in the actual Buddha country as you look at them. You have almost the feeling of being in the same time and place as the action. In private life—before His emergence as a religious figure—the Buddha was Prince Gautama Siddartha, heir to the kingdom of Kapilavastu, one of several small states on the Ganges Plain. There are many traditions about His birth and young

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manhood—how His coming was announced to His mother through a vision of a white elephant; how sages foretold great spiritual achievements for Him; how His father tried to save Him for temporal rule by sheltering Him from the knowledge of others' hardships; but how He learned of these anyway through glimpses of an old man, a sick man and a corpse; and how He resolved to give up His family and wealth and to probe the mysteries of life as a poor wanderer. All these things are shown in the frescoes, right up through the night when He stole away from His palace, cut off His hair and exchanged His princely garb for the rags of a beggar. Thereafter He became one of countless mendicants who lived in the woods of North India then, much as they do now. He travelled from place to place, visiting different sages in their leafy retreats, till he finally took up with the five ascetics to whom He later preached. They were Hindu *brahmins*, convinced that the way to knowledge lay through self-mortification. The Buddha-to-be tried out their system, but abandoned it later when he grew faint after weeks of fasting. This scene is shown graphically in the frescoes. The future Buddha, in emaciated condition, sits cross-legged under an Asian tree with hanging roots, perhaps a banyan. Meanwhile a woman—she is known in Buddhist lore as Sujata, the wife of a rich herdsman—has approached the tree bearing a milk-and-rice dish that she has made for the local wood-god, in thanks for the birth of a son. But she has seen Gautama seated there, has been struck by the air of holiness emanating from Him, and is offering the milk-rice to Him personally. He is about to take it. Meanwhile the five ascetics, seated behind the tree, are watching the scene with frank disapproval; they are murmuring among themselves and are, in fact, planning a mutiny. In Buddhist belief the five had thus far accepted Gautama as their teacher, sensing His greatness, but after seeing Him take the food it is said that they abandoned Him, leaving for Sarnath, 140 miles away. Meanwhile Gautama Himself stayed at that place, which later became Buddhagaya. He moved to the shade of another tree, of a kind very common in India, which is something like the

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Western aspen; it is popularly called the *pipal* by Indians, but in Buddhist circles is known as the Bo or Bodhi tree, the tree of Enlightenment. He stayed there all that night, meditating, and by dawn he had become Enlightened, which is perhaps another way of saying that he had found the Kingdom of Heaven within Himself, in Christ's words. During the night He reputedly underwent many subjective temptations—from lusts, fears etc.— but His understanding was so complete that they did not shake His calm. The fresco shows fierce demons hurling weapons at Him, and pretty girls trying to entice Him, but He sits there untroubled, resplendent in a halo, while the weapons fall short.

Now Gautama had become the Buddha, the "Enlightened One", and was ready to start teaching. He sought out the five ascetics at Sarnath, and when He reached there they sensed His development and greated Him reverently, after varying degrees of hesitation. He then preached His first sermon, or "set the Wheel of the Law in motion" as the Buddhists say. And thenceforth He continued to preach here and there on the Ganges Plain, becoming an honored figure, acquiring many disciples and founding several monasteries. At 80 He passed away, or entered Nirvana. In theory, at least, Buddhists don't see death as a final experience. They believe, as do the Hindus, that souls are successively reborn into this world, and that the bodies used in the process are mere husks, to be abandoned without regret when the time comes. Through this chain of experiences the soul eventually learns so much (it is believed) that it needn't be reborn any more, and at this stage it enters Nirvana, which is a blissful end of the whole birth-death process—the Buddhists see mundane life as essentially benighted and painful.

This doctrine of rebirth and Nirvana (and the undesirability of worldly life) is probably Buddhism's greatest difference from Christianity. Otherwise both teachings seem much the same originally, though each has changed in its travels. Buddhism, like Christianity (or any other religion), seeks to raise the worshipper's consciousness to a realization of some Divine power, higher than anything he can take in by his

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intellect alone. It believes in the unity of all living things, and teaches compassion and humility. It believes also that humans suffer from their lusts, hatreds and sentimental dependencies, and it seeks to cure them of these. Similar ideas are expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, if not always in modern Christian teaching. The Buddha's life was remarkably like Christ's in some ways too. Both had early portents of greatness, followed by a young manhood of obscure preparation and then by a flowering—a readiness to teach the mature gospel—soon after the age of thirty. Following that Their paths separated, of course, the Buddha not being martyred like Christ, but living to a mellow old age, preaching and doing good—various scenes from this later phase are shown in the Sarnath frescoes. In the Buddha's lifetime His religion became well established on the Ganges Plain, and after His passing it continued to grow. Emperor Asoka speeded this growth in the Third Century B.C. He was a great and forceful conqueror—probably India's number-one hero—, and after subduing nearly all the Indian subcontinent he embraced Buddhism in remorse at the blood he had shed. He established the faith in all his domains and some adjoining ones, and in different parts of India great Buddhist monasteries, and monastic universities, sprang up thereafter. Buddhism nearly supplanted Hinduism.

A main characteristic of Hinduism is the caste system, and the Buddhists were against this flatly. The *brahmins*, who made up the first, or priestly, caste of Hinduism, and were responsible for its whole conduct, had a lean time during this period of Buddhist ascendancy, which lasted through the First Millennium A.D. But they hung on somehow, and in the Second Millennium they staged a comeback, thanks largely to the work of Shankaracharya, a gifted *brahmin* theologian. Inspired by Shankaracharya the Hindus gradually drove out Buddhism by various means, including doctrinal arguments and forcible suppression. One thing they did was to take over Buddhist ideas, and to take the Buddha Himself into their fold by declaring Him an incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. This enabled Buddhists to resume Hinduism

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without dropping their worship of Him, and innumerable Hindu families worship Him today, along with gods that are more peculiarly their own. The struggle was complicated by the fact that Muslims were invading India, and making converts, throughout much of the Second Millennium. But in the three-cornered contest it can be said that Buddhism, at least—whose monks had become largely corrupt and self-indulgent by now— was an almost total loser. It ceased being a religion of consequence in India, and is not one there today. But it had meanwhile spread to other Asian countries and covered them like a flood.

Sarnath has many traces of Buddhism's good days. Seven monasteries in all have been found at the site, and some date from almost the time of Christ—it is thought that the Buddha's followers maintained a retreat of some sort in the deer park from the time the first sermon was preached there. The remains to be seen at the site now, dating from the early centuries A.D., have been neatly excavated, making shallow depressions in which lawns are growing. In these are stone foundations, for the most part, of very orderly-looking establishments, with courtyards, common rooms, meditation cells etc. carefully laid out. One gathers that hundreds of monks lived there during the Buddhist flowering (and there were scores of other centers like it in North India then). But the Sarnath monasteries were only jungle-covered mounds when the British began digging them up in the Nineteenth Century. The British digging was amateurish at first, but grew better organized as important officials like Lord Curzon took an interest in it. Indeed it can be said that the modern status of Buddhism in its Holy Land, and the knowledge about it there, owes much to British archaeology—and to British administration, under whose wing the Maha Bodhi Society, for instance, developed.

The British built a good museum at Sarnath, modelled after a U-shaped Buddhist monastery, in which they put many of the objects they had dug up. There are several images of the Buddha Himself there, in the familiar cross-

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legged meditative pose, with His hands in various of the *mudras*—stylized gestures that are thought to be ritually effective in the proper circumstances. These statues all date from some centuries after the Buddha's life, because His followers were initially forbidden to worship idols of Him; they had to confine their devotion to images of His footsteps or His throne, or to offshoots—seedlings—from the original Bo tree. Later the rule was slackened, though, and Buddha images came to be used as religious aids—as symbols of Enlightenment, really, through the contemplation of which worshippers might get some perception of what spiritual understanding was like. The Buddha figure is still widely used today—about as widely as the Christian crucifix, and for much the same purpose: as a symbol on which the worshipper can fix his devotion.

The Sarnath museum also contains the remains of a famous stone column, erected on the spot by Asoka after he had embraced the faith. Its capital consists of four magnificently carved lions, all facing outward and roaring—they are supposed to be roaring the Buddhist doctrine to the four corners of the earth. This device is now the official seal of the Indian government, which in modern times looks back on Asoka, and the early days of Buddhism, with pride and emulation. Lower down, the Asoka column bears relief carvings of the Dharma Chakra, or Wheel of the Law, a design that has likewise been taken up by modern India, and is present on her flag.

These are the principal remains from Asoka's time at Sarnath. The big stupa—the dome-crowned tower more than a hundred feet high—was built under the Imperial Guptas, who ruled India half a dozen centuries later and were likewise protectors of Buddhism. The stupa is another common Buddhist symbol, incidentally. Schematically it is rather like the dome-topped silos now common in America, but it can be of almost any size (and outside of India, indeed, the shape also varies a lot). Stupas are often built over holy relics, and are used by worshippers for circumambulation—the latter walk round and round them, that is, in a clockwise

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direction, praying or chanting holy phrases as they go, and the process is believed to add resonance to their devotions. There are many other stupas at Sarnath too—smaller ones, in the ruined monasteries. The tower put up by Akbar, however, is not in this category; he was a Muslim and built it to glorify not Buddhism, but an earlier visit to the scene by his own father. When the tower was built—1588 A.D.—Sarnath was already abandoned and jungle-smothered, as a result of Hindu and Muslim persecution. As he gazed at the wilderness round him there, Akbar can hardly have guessed at the place's resurrection in modern times, or the bustle to come in B.E. 2500.

I paid my respects briefly to Benares itself while staying there. Benares is thought to be one of the oldest cities in the world, and it is certainly one of the most unusual. Hindus believe that to die there guarantees immediate entry into their equivalent of Nirvana. The city is built on a big curve of the Ganges (which is wide, sluggish and muddy at that point), and the bank is lined by innumerable ghats, or flights of steps descending to the water, where faithful Hindus may bathe or even be cremated. Ceremonial bathing is important in Hinduism, and there is no better place to do it than the Ganges, the holiest of rivers, which descends from the holiest of mountain ranges, the Himalayas. Himalayan run-off has been flowing through the Ganges for ages, and I have heard that oil drills have gone 13,000 feet deep in the Ganges Plain without coming to the bottom of the silt. I have also heard that soundings for bridge piers in the Ganges itself have come on the remains of settlements in the mud there, more than a hundred feet below the surface of the water. The Ganges and its surroundings have existed for a long time, in other words, and you sense this if you take a sightseeing boat along the Benares ghats and watch the bathers absorbed in their age-old immersions, imbibings, chantings and meditations. You sense it too if you wander in the crooked little streets of the city, brushing past the sacred cows and visiting the strange, crowded temples. It is a place that invites much

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study, though not necessarily when one is on a mission concerning Buddhism.

Incidentally Benares, together with Sarnath, is one of the main tourist stops in India. Clark's Hotel, where I stayed while there—a thoroughly Victorian remnant of British days—is the center of this traffic, and it has one or two dozen professional guides attached to it. A guide's fee, apart from any tips or commissions he may get, is twelve rupees a day, or about two and a half dollars. The guides are pleasant, tactful men, and interesting to talk with, though they get rather mechanical when they go into their spiels. "Why is it called Benares?" my guide demanded, without any prompting, when he started showing me around. "Because there are two rivers—the Varuna and the Assi—which join the Ganges here. Varunassi. When the British came they made this Benares, and it has been that ever since, though the spelling was changed when India became independent. It is now B-A-N-A-R-A-S. Banaras." And he went on like that, intermittently, while we surveyed the river, the temples and Sarnath. His information was not perfectly reliable, I found from my reading, but it was a pleasure to get it through the ears that way, while the eyes took in the sights themselves.

The guide told me that a special group of eighty tourists was expected in a few days—passengers on a de-luxe cruise who would leave their ship in Bombay and come to Benares by train, via Delhi. Forty guides and forty cars would be needed for the eighty visitors, he said, and these were being lined up now—the professional guides would be supplemented by part-time workers who had other jobs in town. The guide told me that two or three of these big tourist parties came to Benares each winter, and that their members could see the place in a day with proper management. They would have a special train, and it would pull up at a Benares siding in the early morning. The tourists would descend at 6:30 and would be taken at once to boats on the Ganges, from which they would see the ghats. Then they would go to Clark's for breakfast, after which they would return to the city for a look at the temples and for some shopping if they

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wished (Benares is famous for its hand-woven silk, among other things). Back at Clark's again they would have their lunch—a bland curry, suitable for the Western palate, would be on the menu— and after that they could relax on the verandah while watching, and photographing, magicians, fortune-tellers, snake-charmers and any other exotic entertainers approved by the hotel. This done they would be taken out to Sarnath, then back for tea, then to the train, and that night they would travel on down the Ganges Plain, reaching Calcutta sometime the next morning.

When I left Benares myself, for Buddhagaya, I went to the station before dawn and found on the platform there a tourist party of a different kind: a group of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims sleeping in the open. I had seen other such pilgrims already at Sarnath—clad in their Tibetan gowns and looking tough and travel worn, having walked down for the winter months from their high plateau beyond the Himalayas. This party seemed typical—men, women and children wearing long pigtails, long gowns and high cloth boots bound tightly at their calves. They had big trim-looking packs, which they had disposed on the platform, and most of them were sprawled against these. One woman was awake and was spinning a prayer wheel, a silver one bound in copper. The others were sleeping there on the hard concrete, in their clothes, perhaps with a blanket over them. They seemed indescribably tough and patient. As the train pulled in they woke and got ready to travel, which involved little more than standing up and shouldering their loads.

It took me several hours, on a slow train, to cover the 140 miles, in reverse, that the Buddha had walked over between His Enlightenment and His first sermon. I had already traveled in that region a few times before, in different seasons, and had come to think of it as standing for the real Mother India. The landscape gives an impression of infinite, crumbling age. The earth there is a pale grayish clay, almost white. It makes a fine dust in the dry weather (which can be painfully hot), and this goes everywhere, spreading its influence; it puts a

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dust film on the trees, for instance, and it gets into the water too, including the Ganges, making it a pale grayish brown. The sun's glare reinforces the dusty tone. The cream-colored bullocks and their old carts of weathered wood fit in with it too. The buildings are usually plastered in off-white tones, and the clothing of the poor is tattletale gray. It all makes for a dominant beige, and this even appears in the local food, which consists mainly of grain and lentil preparations; and in the local tableware, which is of pale brass or of "white metal", like nickel. The dried cowdung, seen so often by the road, is pale brown—punk colored— and the punky smell of the many cowdung fires seems to match this. So does the taste of the *dal*—the yellow lentil stew, like thick yellow pea soup—that the people eat. All in all, one gets the impression of a slow-moving, gentle civilization that is pale and bleached out with time. The people, who are small and slow moving too—looking almost brittle—are sunburned to a coffee-bean color, and in the houses and clothes there are many touches of the reds and dark browns that Indians like so. But these really do little more than set off the general dust-of-ages tone.

I was conscious of all this as the train crawled along now, though what the landscape had been like in the Buddha's time was another question. From reading about His life I felt that it must have been more forested—more jungly. I also guessed that North India had been cooler then, and more conducive to a vigorous life; but I couldn't document this notion.

Buddhagaya is a village, six or eight miles from the railway, and I drove out there in a taxi through the countryside. The village is dominated by a temple, built in the early centuries A.D., that has a special form rather like a steep pyramid or pinnacle—a four-sided sugarloaf—deeply encrusted on its sides with Buddha images and other decorations in high relief. It towers the trees and other buildings, and you see it as you draw near. Then you go through a narrow bazaar street—open-fronted shops on either hand— after which you

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round a corner, climb a slight rise, and pull up near the temple itself. Buddhagaya's main feature is the original Bo tree, which stands against one of the temple's sides. The tree is old and spreading, but its leaves are green, and during my visit some Tibetan banners and prayer-flags were hanging in them—pieces of cloth, some of bright colors and some of white, the latter grayed down by print. Beneath the tree were a stone platform and an arrangement of benches or low tables. Three elderly Burmese women, pilgrims, were circumambulating the tree when I arrived, stopping now and then to bow down and make offerings of flowers. They wore long, colorful Burmese skirts and had a refined, upper-class look to them. Meanwhile a number of Tibetan pilgrims were circumambulating the temple as a whole, while telling their prayer-beads and chanting. Some wore the maroon robes of lamas—monks—and some the gray ones of laymen; there were women and children with them too. A good many workmen were up on the sides of the temple, scraping, cleaning and re-plastering the stones. Others were busy in the grounds near by, grading and landscaping. The work seemed about on the scale of that at Sarnath, and I learned later that these two sites, plus Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace, and Kusinara, the scene of His passing away, were being refurbished in approximately equal degree (mainly by Indian government funds except for Lumbini, which is just over the border in the present Nepal). The Buddhagaya temple could plainly use the repairs it was getting. Its sides, with all their elaborate statuary, were mainly of plaster, and this darkens and flakes off quickly in the rains and heat of those parts. The maintenance of temples in South Asia is always a problem—traditionally, indeed, it is a major burden on the philanthropists there. The Buddhagaya temple seemed to be getting enough repairs now to last it for years.

I found out, then and later, that the temple was just now returning to Buddhist hands, having been in those of the Hindus for centuries, since far back in the time of Buddhist suppression. For decades now the Buddhists, led by the Maha Bodhi Society, had been struggling to regain control of it,

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but this had been a desirable asset financially, and the old Hindu *mahant*, or head priest, who had inherited the living there had been reluctant to let it go. As India had grown more accessible to Buddhists elsewhere, in the later British period, funds had poured into Buddhagaya for repairs to the temple, but the *mahant*—or so I have been told by Buddhists—had merely pocketed them. This situation has been improving recently, with the approach of 2500 B.E., partly because India's secular leaders, from Pandit Nehru down, have wished to make a good impression on the Buddhist world. Legislation has been passed giving the temple's management to a joint committee, with Hindu and Buddhist members, and its premises are now being used for worship by both faiths. I visited the main temple chamber, set deep in the base of the pyramid, and found there a gilt Buddha image together with a stone version of the Shiva *lingam*, a phallic symbol that is among Hinduism's main objects of devotion. But in general the trappings of the place were overwhelmingly Buddhist, as Buddhagaya is historically a great shrine for that faith, and only incidentally one for Hinduism. Round the temple stood scores of small Buddhist stupas, and there were great stone reliefs of the Buddha's footprints there; and other Buddhist statues; and secondary Bo trees; and Buddhist temple bells that would hold a clear note interminably—or so it seemed—when struck.

Buddhagaya is a more cosmopolitan shrine than Sarnath. The distinction between the two is elusive, but I gather that Sarnath is respected as the birthplace of the religion—since the doctrine was first enunciated there— while Buddhagaya is credited with a special mystic virtue, as a place where Enlightenment came once and may come again. For this reason, perhaps, Buddhist pilgrims focus on Buddhagaya especially, and they give it many exotic touches. Aside from its main shrine the Buddhagaya site already contains Chinese, Burmese and Tibetan temples, put up by the faithful among those peoples. The Tibetan temple is especially picturesque, being in the Tibetan style—a predominately white building, that is, with black bordered windows and touches of yellow,

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smoky red and other colors here and there. During my visit several Tibetans were camped in the open beside it, making their peculiar buttered tea by smoky fires. Their outlandishness emphasized that Buddhism is a widespread faith, and I learned that further signs of this were expected at Buddhagaya if current anniversary plans came off. I talked with a young official of the Maha Bodhi Society, which maintains a hostel at Buddhagaya, and he told me that nearly all the Buddhist countries in the world were planning to celebrate the year by building something there. The Tibetans and Chinese wished to extend their temples, and the Buddhists of Thailand, Ceylon, Cambodia, Laos, Japan and Nepal wished to build new ones. The Thais had already bought land and were contemplating a big establishment, including a monastery, a library, a meditation center, a school, a dispensary and a training center for monks. It was predicted that this would cost the equivalent of five or ten million dollars, and of course would be a handsome addition to the scene. Dreams should not be confused with reality in Asia, but even so I guessed that Buddhagaya might soon boast a considerable international center. The Indian government was pushing this development, I learned. Committees had been appointed, and plans had been drawn up to "improve" the countryside within a two-mile radius. Villages would be moved, according to these plans, to make way for Buddhist institutions, and so would the bazaar in Buddhagaya itself. The young Maha Bodhi man spoke of a great inter-religious discussion center that might grow up there, with Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims and others coming to stay and share their spiritual insights. (But the gap between dreams and reality should always be kept in mind. While I was at Buddhagaya the bazaar was still refusing to budge, despite all the planning, and so was a small village close at hand—the latter was inhabited, I learned, by a tribe of beggars who live off the pilgrims and who hoped naturally enough, to keep their residence near their work.)

After talking with the Maha Bodhi man I took a stroll through the fields outside Buddhagaya, and while doing so

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I chanced on a gentle, elderly Indian whom I had met before, a follower of Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan or "Land Gift" movement, which is a Gandhian—Hindu—revivalist group with Buddhist overtones. This old man told me he had settled in Buddhagaya because the Bhoodan movement had started an *ashram*, or religious retreat, there; and the purpose of this *ashram* was also to help develop some universal faith, or inter-faith harmony, that might ease the world's conflicts. After talking with him, and walking on, I began to feel that Buddhagaya was a likely center for the religious upsurge that seems to be brewing in South Asia now. This upsurge is hard to describe, and contains some anomalies. It is formed primarily round Buddhism and partly round Hinduism; and these religions, while peaceful and tolerant at heart, have also begun functioning as vehicles for cultural nationalism, and especially anti-Westernism, in countries where they prevail. Partly this is inevitable, as many people in those countries are dissatisfied with Western materialism and have been turning back to their old faiths—rather blindly, perhaps—as an alternative. But the trend is also heightened and exploited by politicians who see it as a way of separating the Buddhist countries from Western influence and organizing them regionally. India's encouragement of Buddhism in the anniversary year has no doubt been tinged with this motive. Though India is no longer Buddhist, she has prestige with Buddhist countries because the latter's religion—and with it much of their culture—is derived from her. In 2500 B.E., it seemed, she had a good chance to turn some of this prestige into political influence.

The Asian Communists were likewise doing what they could in the Buddhist-anniversary game, I learned then and later. Tibet and Mongolia, which the Reds now control, used to be wholly Buddhist countries, and China had many Buddhists in its population before they took over there. The state of Buddhism in these places can only be guessed at now, but the Reds claim it is flourishing, and they have presumably set out to persuade other Buddhist countries of this during the anniversary. After I left India in fact they sent the

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yonthful Dalai and Panchen Lamas there to visit the shrines and make an impression. The Dalai and Panchen Lamas are the main figures in Tibetan Buddhism, and among the most famous Buddhists in the world, and they are believed to be safe supporters of the Reds by now. They and various fellow Buddhists from Tibet, Mongolia, and China have appeared in India this year as missionaries of a new kind.

Political gestures like this are important, even if sometimes lost on Westerners. The Buddhists of Asia are numbered in the hundred-millions. As a rule they are classed under two heads—the Northern or *Mahayana* Buddhists, who prevail in China, Japan, Korea, Tibet and the Himalayas; and the Southern or *Theravada* Buddhists, who prevail in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. (In general *Mahayana* Buddhism spread north from India by land, while *Theravada* spread south and east by sea.) From some viewpoints the differences between these sects are crucial—and each is further divided into many sub-sects—but for distant Westerners the groupings can all be simply called Buddhist. Their members all believe in some version of the Buddha's teaching, and can be influenced by appeals related to it.

Before leaving Buddhagaya I saw an example of what Buddhism means, more intimately, to some of its followers. After the conversations noted above I kept on walking in the fields, and dusk fell while I did so. The temple was in sight, and of course its towering mass grew darker. The side nearest me, however—it chanced to be the one overlooking the Bo tree—was lit up by a pinkish glow, and this grew brighter as the darkness thickened. The light was coming from under the tree itself, I gathered, and I started back there to learn what was happening. As I reached the spot I saw that some Tibetan monks had set out an expanse of small lamps on the benches and stone platforms under the tree. The lamps were primitive ones—little open cups with floating wicks—about the size of church candles, and they had been placed together in solid rectangles. There were more than a thousand of them, and *en masse* they looked like rippling sheets of flame. They

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lit up the Bo tree from underneath, and lit up the temple beside it to a place far up on its height. I took it that Enlightment was being symbolized—and aptly too—by the ceremony.

Several other people were on hand, and as I stood there enjoying the scene a man of Tibetan or Chinese features came up and spoke to me in English. He was from Sikkim, I learned—a tiny Buddhist state in the Himalayas next to Tibet—and had traveled down to Buddhagaya with his family for a visit. We talked along, in the lambent glow, and the man told me it was he who had asked the monks to stage the ceremony. I asked if the latter was indeed symbolic of Enlightment, and he said it was; and he added that every Sikkimese or Tibetan home had a shrine in it, with an image of the Buddha, and that a light was always kept burning there if possible.

We kept on talking, watching the sheets of flame. There was emotion in my companion's voice, and he seemed glad to be sharing it; his spirit seemed outgoing, like that in Western families at Christmas time. Presently a nice-looking boy came walking by, and the man stopped him and introduced him as his son; and he explained that the ceremony was being held in the son's behalf. The latter had just turned twelve, he said, and this meant the completion of a twelve-year cycle, the unit by which Sikkimese, like Tibetans, measure their ages. It was an important occasion, and the family had decided to bring the boy to Buddhagaya and mark it properly (I was soon introduced to the mother and some other relatives, who had been standing in the background). The boy had circumambulated the temple a prescribed number of times, and had made obeisances. He had been through an initiation, one might say. Seen now, with the warm light shining from the side, he looked upright, glowing and suitably impressed by the moment, much as a Western boy might seem at his confirmation, if the latter were artistically staged. I shook hands and congratulated him with an enthusiasm that had been steadily growing in me, and as we parted I felt that Buddhism was a living faith with

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those pilgrims at least. And they were not ignorant people either, nor monks; but educated, prosperous laymen.

I caught a train that night for New Delhi, and since then I haven't really checked on the Buddhist anniversary details; it is not a subject that lends itself to facts and figures anyway—the man-hours spent this year in worship and meditation are quite beyond guessing at, for instance. One probably cannot exaggerate the year's importance for the common people in the Buddhist countries. It has been looked on as a time of change, purification, and portents. Many have believed it would start a new era of some kind, perhaps taking the world out of the decline it is held to be in—the idea that Buddhism can save the West from itself is now a prevalent one in Asia. Here we can't presume to comment on these possibilities, but it does seem a fair guess that something new and subtle has been launched in B.E. 2500, if only because so many people have expected it.

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OEDIPUS TO THE ORACLE

(from Colonus)

Tête complète et parfait diademe,
Je suis en toi le secret changement.

I

Your will is done. Its promise, that I fled,
Drove me from friends and from the high homeland,
Where bear-grass stung like snakebite and my skin
Chilled, as with fever, when the thin air stirred.
I came from foothills, down through mesa draws,
Past stunted-yucca slopes to cottonwood
And willow wash. Quick movements cooled my eyes,
Till each thing grew as clear as if it stood,
And rested with more meaning when it ceased,
As, when a lake wind drops, reflected leaves
Tremble an instant longer than the water
As clear in motion as when they are still.
I stayed, an honored guest. Refusing there
All choice, I tried to break your prophecy.
Feasted to sleep, I lay without my fear.
Straight, with light flesh moving on waist and thigh,
Young women turning naked held my eyes,
Or, if they came in darkness, their bare feet
Fell sweeter than lutenotes. As contours shift
In the lithe haze, each object I once sought
Lost its identity in new sensations
And faded till desire for it had ceased.
My calm increased, but when my anger came
I could not hold it, and the stranger died.

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II

I left and travelled back through ease to choice.
With partial knowledge, grown ambitious, sure,
I answered your enigma to the Sphinx.
Pretendent to the throne, I came to Thebes
So that I might have heirs, and heirs, a kingdom.
The queen became my bride; I gained the crown,
And Creon watched, mistrusting most what seemed
Most innocent. Again deceived, I found
Peace in the ceremonial love of wealth,
Its end the pestilence, and joy in marriage,
Its consummation incest—all this to breed,
And who is bred must learn again what error,
Perversion, and deceit conceive a child,
A riddle's answer on a dusty road.
Tiresias knew my crime; I sought his vision
But did not know that I should tear my eyes
For so much darkness and so little light.
Blind in the noon I stood and cursed you, seeing
Of all I had been once that there remained
Only a lingering brutality,
Worn to a thinness that is age. I felt
The desert drying after centuries
Of wind and drying; no time can cool this heat,
Nor teach me how to expiate your will.

III

Barefoot, with thin chiton, Antigone
Led me from Thebes. Her eyes moved in my mind,
And, as she spoke, I saw the buzzard's shadow
Wrinkle over rock and the lizards catch
On the edge of shade. Apollo sent us on:
"There is a grove that stands closeby Colonus
Called Eumenides, consecrate to them
Who shall restore your power." Your thought is fact,
And, centered in your mind, my course swung true,

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Enclosing what is real from what is not,
Till my experience seemed reality—
While memory, unabsolute with hope
And disappointment, changed with what I knew
Without my knowing. What I did not perceive
Ceased to exist; what I could not endure.
I could deny: I had assumed your power.
When we came to the grove, I sought no more
From Theseus than this shade and learned that I
Controlled the fate of Thebes. Through the night wind
In a dream, part by part, I quieted
The leaves to hear your voice, and yet one part
I could not still: Creon stood in those trees—
Above, an old nest in a leafless web
Of branches still heaved like a dying wasp.

IV

He seized my daughters, swore to have me come
Or a whip make their naked, loosened flesh
Leap on the bone. Their cries would be your words
Which I could neither silence nor endure.
Distinct from what I could not change, no longer
The perfect agent of a perfect cause,
I struck in your pure crystal of events
The imperfection of fortuity—
My own identity beyond prediction.
For even now, while I fulfil your words,
We grow apart. You have not thought or felt
What I have felt; what you did once, or said,
Does not affect you now. I learn and age,
While you, pure knowledge, touching all, like time,
Have no remembrance or maturity.
One is what one has done; choice must relate
The past to circumstance: though you prevent
What I would do, you force me still to choose.
I called, and Theseus intercepted Creon,
Bound him, and freed my daughters, left me true

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To their past love and each son's hate which shall
At last be true to him. Betraying either,
I should have, day by day, betrayed myself,
Though pride, with nothing to defend, should pass.

V

Then, from Poseidon's altar, my son came,
Begging through the shadows for my body,
Lest it return to Thebes to save those walls
He tried to save once by my banishment.
He spoke as softly as Antigone.
Holding her hand, cautious of Creon's eyes,
The seventh of the seven against Thebes
Urged peace and for forgiveness promised me
The robe of justice to avenge my sight,
Slaves from each household, and his brother's house
And lands and wife—or, were the seige too long,
A ruined city for a private tomb.
He offered all I came there once to find—
A queen and power—and all I found and left—
A city ruined by my coming there.
He heard my curse, drawn, like an arrow, back
In memory. Feathered by ghostly hands,
It flew along the vision that remains:
Laius dying, Tiresias healing Thebes,
And there, so still her body did not turn,
Jocasta hanging in the silent court.
I banished him to Thebes. Let him seek you
To find the way there; I am free to go
From darkness into darkness to my peace.

—WESLEY TRIMPI

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LAETITIA

(To the audience, with the air of ~~someone~~ a person compulsively going over and over something, almost whispering.)

I made the settlement. They took me down.
I rolled my head on the pillow, and I tried to pray.
Oh, God, even if You're God, and made the world,
And take a mind, with one big huff-and-puff
Could blow the moon and stars off, down the sky,
Like a boy blowing dandelion fuzz -- oh, God,
Even if You're God, even God hasn't got the right
To keep me from knowing the reason things happen to me.
If I don't know that, then I'm nothing, and God, all I want
Is a name to name it, and not be nothing, just nothing, God,

WRITER

So all you demand is definition, too,
Just like poor Lilburn. Well, now would you hate him less
If you thought that he, like you --

LAETITIA

Oh, I don't hate him!
Oh, he could be sweet, so sweet. Once we walked in the woods,
'Twas fall, and the sunshine bright, and the trees bright-colored,
And one big sweet-gum golder than the sun.
You know how a sweet-gum is, the leaves like stars.
He cut a branch and held it in his hand.
Then, "Stop!" he ~~said --~~ and then -- and then --

LILBURN

(Suddenly appearing with a sweet-gum bough of gold, star-shaped leaves)

Stop! ah, Tishie, dear Tishie --
Your hair's all gold, Laetitia, gold, and now --

(He begins putting gold leaves in her hair, like a coronal.)

The stars are in it gold -- I put them there!

(Standing back to admire his work)

Oh, Tishie, you're an angel from the sky.

(He stares at her a moment, silently, then steps abruptly to her side, seizes her wrist, leans at her and speaks in an intense whisper.)

A work sheet from a verse-play now being written by Robert Penn Warren. It is based on the narrative poem Brother to Dragons.

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Sketch by Zubel Kachadoorian

THE ART OF FICTION XVIII

ROBERT PENN WARREN

This interview takes place in the apartment of Ralph Ellison at the American Academy in Rome: a comfortable room filled with books and pictures. Mr. Penn Warren, who might be described as a sandy man with a twinkle in his eye, is ensconced in an armchair while the Interviewers, manning tape recorder and notebook, are perched on straight-back chairs. Mrs. Ellison, ice-bowl tinkling, comes into the room occasionally to replenish the glasses: all drink pastis.

* * *

INTERVIEWERS

First, if you're agreeable, Mr. Warren, a few biographical details just to get you "placed"... I believe you were a Rhodes Scholar—

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WARREN

Yes, from Kentucky.

INTERVIEWERS

University of Kentucky?

WARREN

No, I attended Vanderbilt. But I was Rhodes Scholar from Kentucky.

INTERVIEWERS

Were you writing then?

WARREN

As I am now, trying to.

INTERVIEWERS

Did you start writing in college?

WARREN

I had no interest in writing when I went to college. I was interested in reading... oh, poetry and standard novels, you know... my ambitions were purely scientific but I got cured of that fast by bad instruction in Freshman Chemistry and good instruction in Freshman English.

INTERVIEWERS

What were the works that were especially meaningful for you? What books were—well, doors opening?

WARREN

Well, several things come right away to mind. First of all when I was six, *Horatius at the Bridge*, I thought was pretty grand—when they read it to me, to be more exact.

INTERVIEWERS

And others?

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WARREN

Yes, *How They Brought the Good News from Aix to Ghent* (at about age nine). I thought it was pretty nearly the height of human achievement. I didn't know whether I was impressed by riding a horse that fast or writing the poem. I couldn't distinguish between the two, but I knew there was something pretty fine going on... Then *Lycidas*.

INTERVIEWERS

At what age were you then?

WARREN

Oh, thirteen, something like that. By that time I knew it wasn't what was happening in the poem that was important—it was the poem. I had crossed the line.

INTERVIEWERS

An important frontier, that. What about prose works?

WARREN

Then I discovered Buckle's *History of Civilization*. Did you ever read Buckle?

INTERVIEWERS

Of course, and Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*. Most Southern bookshelves contain that.

WARREN

...And Prescott... and *The Oregon Trail* is always hovering around there somewhere. Thing that interested me about Buckle was that he had the one big answer to everything: *geography*. History is all explained by geography. I read Buckle and then I could explain everything. It gave me quite a hold over the other kids, they hadn't read Buckle. I had the answer to everything. Buckle was my Marx. That is, he gave you one answer to everything, and the same dead-sure certainty. After I had had my session with Buckle and the one-answer system at the age of 13, or whatever it was, I was somewhat

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inoculated against Marx and his one-answer system when he and the depression hit me when I was about twenty-five. I am not being frivolous about Marx. I know how much we and the world we live in are conditioned by him and now deep some of his insights are. But when I began to hear some of my friends talk about him in 1930, I thought, "Here we go again, boys." I had previously got hold of one key to the universe: Buckle. And somewhere along the way I had lost the notion that there was ever going to be just one key.

But getting back to that shelf of books, the Motley and Prescott and Parkman, etc., isn't it funny how unreadable most history written now is when you compare it with those writers?

INTERVIEWERS

Well, there's Samuel Eliot Morison.

WARREN

Yes, a very fine writer. Another is Van Woodward, he writes very well indeed. And Bruce Catton. But Catton maybe doesn't count, he's not a professional historian. If he wants to write a book on history that happens to be good history and good writing at the same time, there isn't any graduate school to try to stop him.

INTERVIEWERS

It's very interesting that you were influenced by historical writing so early in life. It has always caught one's eye how history is used in your work, for instance *Night Rider*.

WARREN

Well, that isn't a historical novel. The events belonged to my early childhood. I remember the troops coming in when martial law was declared in that part of Kentucky. When I wrote the novel I wasn't thinking of it as history. For one thing, the world it treated still, in a way, survived. You could still talk to the old men who had been involved. In the 1930's I remember going to see a judge down in Kentucky—he was an elderly man then—a man of the highest integrity and

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reputation— who had lived through that period and who by common repute had been mixed up in it—his father had been a tobacco grower. He got to talking about that period in Kentucky. He said, "Well, I won't say who was and who wasn't mixed up in some of those things, but I will make one observation: I have noticed that the sons of those who were opposed to getting a fair price for tobacco ended up as either bootleggers or brokers." But he was an old-fashioned kind of guy, for whom bootlegging and brokerage looked very much alike. Such a man didn't look "historical" thirty years ago. Now he looks like the thigh bone of a mastodon.

INTERVIEWERS

It seems clear that you don't write "historical" novels: they are always concerned with urgent problems, but the awareness of history seems to be central.

WARREN

I don't think I do write historical novels. I try to find stories that catch my eye, stories that seem to have issues in purer form than they come to one ordinarily.

INTERVIEWERS

A kind of unblurred topicality?

WARREN

I wrote two unpublished novels in the 30's. *Night Rider* is the world of my childhood. *Heaven's Gate* was contemporary. My third published, *All the King's Men*, was worlds I had seen. All the short stories were contemporary. The novel I'm writing now, and two I plan, are all contemporary.

INTERVIEWERS

Brother to Dragons was set in the past.

WARREN

It belonged to a historical setting but it was not a departure: it was a matter of dealing with issues in a more mythical form.

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I hate costume novels, but maybe I've written some and don't know it! I have a romantic kind of interest in the objects of American history: saddles, shoes, figures of speech, rifles, etc. They're worth a lot. Help you focus. There *is* a kind of extraordinary romance about American history. That's the only word for it... a kind of self-sufficiency. You know, the grandpas and the great grandpas carried the assumption that somehow their lives and their decisions were important; that as they went up, down, here and there, such a life was important and that it was a man's responsibility to live it.

INTERVIEWERS

In this connection, do you feel that there are certain themes which are basic to the American experience, even though a body of writing in a given period might ignore or evade them?

WARREN

First thing, without being systematic, that comes to mind without running off a week and praying about it, would be that America was based on a big promise—a great big one: the Declaration of Independence... When you have to live with that in the house, that's quite a problem—particularly when you've got to make money and get ahead, open world markets, do all the things you have to, raise your children, and so forth. America is stuck with its self-definition put on paper in 1776, and that was just like putting a burr under the metaphysical saddle of America—you see, that saddle's going to jump now and then and it pricks. There's another thing in the American experience that makes for a curious kind of abstraction. We had to suddenly define ourselves and what we stood for in one night. No other nation ever had to do that. In fact, one man did it. One man in an upstairs room, Thomas Jefferson. Sure, you might say that he was the amanuensis for a million or so people stranded on the edge of the continent and backed by a wilderness, and there's some sense in that notion. But *somebody* had to formulate it—in fact, just overnight, whatever the complicated back-

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ground of that formulation— and we've been stuck with it ever since. With the very words it used—"free and equal". Do you know the Polish writer Adam Gurowski? * He was of a highly-placed Polish family; he came and worked as a civil servant in Washington, a clerk, a kind of self-appointed spy on democracy. His book *America*—of 1857, I think—begins by saying that America is unique among nations because other nations are accidents of geography or race, but America is based on an idea. Behind the comedy of proclaiming that idea from Fourth of July platforms there is the solemn notion, *Believe and ye shall be saved.* That abstraction sometimes does become concrete, is a part of the American experience — and the American problem — the lag between idea and fact, between word and flesh.

INTERVIEWERS

What about historical time? America has had so much happening in such a short time.

WARREN

Awful lot of foreshortening in it. America lives in two times, chronological time and history. The last widow drawing a pension from the War of 1812 died just a few years ago. My father was old enough to vote when the last full-scale battle against Indians was fought—a couple of regiments, I think, of regulars with artillery.

INTERVIEWERS

From the first your work is very explicitly concerned with moral judgements, even during a period of history when much American fiction was concerned with moral questions only in the narrow way of the "proletarian" and "social realism" novels of the 1930's.

WARREN

I think I ought to say that behind *Night Rider* and my next

* *Adam Gurowski, 1805–1866, author of* America and Europe *(1857) and* My Diary: Notes on the Civil War *(1866) among other works.*

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novel, *At Heaven's Gate* there was a good deal of the shadow not only of the events of that period but of the fiction of that period. I am more aware of that fact now than I was then. Of course only an idiot could have not been aware that he was trying to write a novel about, in one sense, "social justice" in *Night Rider*, or for that matter, *At Heaven's Gate*. But in some kind of a fumbling way I was aware, I guess, of trying to find the dramatic rub of the story at some point a little different from and deeper than the point of dramatic rub in some of the then current novels. But what I want to emphasize is the fact that I was fumbling rather than working according to plan and convictions already arrived at. When you start any book you don't know what, ultimately, your issues are. You try to write to find them. You're fiddling with the stuff, hoping to make sense, whatever kind of sense you can make.

INTERVIEWERS

At least you could say that as a Southerner you were more conscious of what some of the issues were. You couldn't, I assume, forget the complexity of American social reality, no matter what your aesthetic concerns, or other concerns.

WARREN

It never crossed my mind when I began writing fiction that I could write about anything except life in the South. It never crossed my mind that I knew about anything else; knew, that is, well enough to write about. Nothing else ever nagged you enough to stir the imagination. But I stumbled into fiction, rather late. I've got to be autobiographical about this. For years I didn't have much interest in fiction, that is, in college. I was reading my head off in poetry, Elizabethan and the moderns, Yeats, Hardy, Eliot, Hart Crane. I wasn't seeing the world around me—that is, in any way that might be thought of as directly related to fiction. Be it to my everlasting shame that when the Scopes trial was going on a few miles from me I didn't even bother to go. My head was too full of John Ford and John Webster and William Blake and

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T. S. Eliot. If I had been thinking about writing novels about the South I would have been camping in Dayton, Tennessee —and would have gone about it like journalism. At least the Elizabethans saved me from that. As for starting fiction, I simply stumbled on it. In the spring of 1930 I was in Oxford, doing graduate work. I guess I was homesick, and not knowing it. Paul Rosenfeld, who with Van Wyck Brooks and Lewis Mumford, was then editing the old *American Caravan*, wrote and asked me why I didn't try a long story for them. He had had the patience one evening to listen to me blowing off about night-rider stories from boyhood. So Oxford and homesickness, or at least back-homeward-looking, and Paul Rosenfeld made me write *Prime Leaf*, a novelette, which appeared in the Caravan, and was later the germ of *Night Rider*. I remember playing hookey from academic work to write the thing, and the discovery that you could really enjoy trying to write fiction. It was a new way of looking at things, and my head was full of recollections of the way objects looked in Kentucky and Tennessee. It was like going back to the age of twelve, going fishing and all that. It was a sense of freedom and excitement.

INTERVIEWERS

When you started writing, what preoccupations, technically and thematically, had you in common with your crowd?

WARREN

I suppose you mean the poets called the Fugitive Group, in Nashville—Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore, etc.?

INTERVIEWERS

Yes.

WARREN

Well, in one sense, I don't know what the group had in common. I think there is a great fallacy in assuming that there was a systematic program behind the Fugitive Group. There

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was no such thing, and among the members there were deep differences in temperament and aesthetic theory. They were held together by geography and poetry. They all lived in Nashville, and they were all interested in poetry. Some were professors, some businessmen, one was a banker, several were students. They met informally to argue philosophy and read each other the poems they wrote. For some of them these interests were incidental to their main concerns. For a couple of others, like Tate, it was poetry or death. Their activity wasn't any "school" or "program". Mutual respect and common interests—that was what held them together—that and the provincial isolation, I guess.

INTERVIEWERS

But did you share with them any technical or thematic preoccupations?

WARREN

The answer can't, you see, apply to the group. But in a very important way, that group was my education. I knew individual writers, poems and books through them. I was exposed to the liveliness and range of the talk and the wrangle of argument. I heard the talk about techniques but techniques regarded as means of expression. But most of all I got the feeling that poetry was a vital activity, that it related to ideas and to life. I came into the group rather late. I was timid and reverential I guess. And I damned well should have been. Anyway, there was little or no talk in those days about fiction. Some of the same people, a little later however, did give me in a very concrete way a sense of how literature can be related to place and history.

INTERVIEWERS

It's very striking when you consider writing by Southerners before the 20's. Some think that few writers were then in the South as talented or as competent, or as confident as today. This strikes us as a very American cultural phenomenon in spite of its specifically regional aspects. Would you

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say that this was a kind of repetition of what occurred in New England say, during the 1830's?

WARREN

Yes, I do see some parallel between New England before the Civil War and the South after World War I to the present. The old notion of a shock, a cultural shock, to a more or less closed and static society—you know, what happened on a bigger scale in the Italian Renaissance or Elizabethan England. After 1918 the modern industrial world, with its good and bad, hit the South, all sorts of ferments began. As for individual writers, almost all of them of that period had had some important experience outside the South, then returned there—some strange mixture of continuity and discontinuity in their experience—a jagged quality. But more than mere general cultural or personal shocks, there was a moral shock in the South, a tension that grew out of the race situation. That moral tension had always been there, but it took new and more exacerbated forms after 1920. For one thing, the growing self-consciousness of the Negroes opened up possibilities for expanding economic and cultural horizons. A consequence was that the Southerner's loyalties and pieties —real values, mind you—were sometimes staked against his religious and moral sense, equally real values. There isn't much vital imagination, it seems to me, that doesn't come from this sort of shock, imbalance, need to "re-live", re-define life.

INTERVIEWERS

There is, for us, an exciting spiral of redefinition in your own work from *I'll Take My Stand* through the novels to *Segregation*. It would seem that these works mark stages in a combat with the past. In the first, the point of view seems orthodox and unreconstructed. How can one say it? In recent years your work has become more intense and has taken on an element of personal confession which is so definite that one tends to look, for example, on *Segregation* and *Brother to Dragons* as two facets of a single attitude.

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WARREN

You've thrown several different things at me here. Let me try to sort them out. First you refer to the Southern Agrarian book *I'll Take My Stand*, of 1930, and then to my recent little book on *Segregation*. My essay in *I'll Take My Stand* was about the Negro in the South, and it was a defense of segregation. I haven't read that piece, as far as I can remember, since 1930, and I'm not sure exactly how things are put there. But I do recall very distinctly the circumstances of writing it. I wrote it at Oxford at about the same time I began writing fiction—the two things were tied together—the look back home from a long distance. I remember the jangle and wrangle of writing the essay and some kind of discomfort in it, some sense of evasion, I guess, in writing it, in contrast with the free feeling of writing the novelette *Prime Leaf*, the sense of seeing something fresh, the holiday sense plus some stirring up of something inside yourself. In the essay I reckon I was trying to prove something and in the novelette trying to find out something, see something, feel something—exist. Don't misunderstand me. On the objective side of things, there wasn't a power under heaven that could have changed segregation in 1929 — the South wasn't ready for it, the North wasn't ready for it, the Negro wasn't. The Court, if I remember correctly, had just reaffirmed segregation, too. No, I'm not talking about the objective fact, but about the subjective fact, yours truly, in relation to the objective fact. Well, it wasn't being outside the South that made me change my mind. It was coming back home. In a little while I realized I simply couldn't have written that essay again. I guess trying to write fiction made me realize that. If you are seriously trying to write fiction you can't allow yourself as much evasion as in trying to write essays. But some people can't read fiction. One reviewer—a professional critic—said that *Band of Angels* is an apology for the plantation system. Well the story of *Band* wasn't an apology *or* an attack. It was simply trying to say something about something. But God Almighty, you have to spell it out for some people, especially a certain breed of professional defender-of-the-good,

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who makes a career of holding the right thoughts and admiring his own moral navel. Well, that's getting off the point. What else was it you threw at me?

INTERVIEWERS

Would you say that each book marks a redefinition of reality arrived at through a combat with the past? A development from the traditional to the highly personal of reality? A confession?

WARREN

I never thought of a combat with the past. I guess I think more of trying to find what there is valuable to us, the line of continuity to us, and *through* us. The specific Southern past, I'm now talking about. As for combat, I guess the real combat is always with yourself, Southerner or anybody else. You fight your battles one by one and do the best you can. Whatever patterns there are, develop—aren't planned—the really basic patterns, I mean, the kind you live into. As for confession, that wouldn't have occurred to me, but I do know that in the last ten years or a little more the personal relation to my writing changed. I never bothered to define the change. I quit writing poems for several years, that is, I'd start them, get a lot down, then feel that I wasn't connecting somehow. I didn't finish one for several years, they felt false. Then I got back at it, and that is the bulk of what I've done since *Band of Angels*, — a new book of poems which will be out in the summer. When you try to write a book—even objective fiction—you have to write from the inside not the outside—the inside of yourself—you have to find what's there—you can't predict it—just dredge for it—and hope you have something worth the dredging. That isn't "confession"—that's just trying to use whatever the Lord lets you lay hand to. And of course you have to have commonsense enough and structural sense enough to know what is relevant. You don't choose a story, it chooses you. You get together with that story somehow... You're stuck with it. There certainly is some reason it attracted you and you're writing

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it trying to find out that reason; justify, get at that reason. I can always look back and remember the exact moment when I encountered the germ of any story I wrote—a clear flash...

INTERVIEWERS

What is your period of incubation? Months? Years?

WARREN

Something I read or see stays in my head for five or six years. I always remember the date, the place, the room, the road, when I first was struck. For instance, *World Enough and Time*. Katherine Anne Porter and I were both at the Library of Congress as Fellows. We were in the same pew, had offices next to each other. She came in one day with an old pamphlet, the trial of Beauchamp for killing Col. Sharp. She said, "Well, Red, you better read this." There it was. I read it in five minutes. But I was six years making the book. Any book I write starts with a flash but takes a long time to shape up. All of your first versions are in your head so by the time you sit down to write you have some line developed in your head.

INTERVIEWERS

What is the relation of sociological research and other types of research to the forms of fiction?

WARREN

I think it's purely accidental. For one writer a big dose of such stuff might be fine, for another it might be poison... I've known a good many people, some of them writers, who think of literature as *material* that you "work up". You don't "work up" literature. They point at Zola. But Zola didn't do that. Nor did Dreiser. They may have thought they did, but they didn't. They weren't "working up" something—in one sense, something was working them up. You see the world as best you can—with or without the help of somebody's research, as the case may be. You see as much as you can, and the events and books that are interesting to you

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should be interesting to you because you're a human being, not because you're trying to be a writer. Then those things may be of some use to you as a writer later on. I don't believe in a schematic approach to material. The business of researching for a book strikes me as a sort of obscenity. What I mean is, researching for a book in the sense of trying to find a book to write. Once you are engaged by a subject, are in your book, have your idea, you may or may not want to do some investigating. But you ought to do it in the same spirit in which you'd take a walk in the evening air to think things over. You can't research to get a book. You stumble on it. Or hope to. Maybe you will, if you live right.

INTERVIEWERS

Speaking of craft, how conscious are you of the dramatic structure of your novels when you begin? I ask because in it there is quite a variety of sub-forms, folklore, set pieces like the *Ballad of Billy Potts* or the Cass Mastern episode in *All the King's Men*. Are these planned as part of the dramatic structure, or do they arise while you are being carried by the flow of invention?

WARREN

I try to think a lot about the craft of other people—that's part of my long years of teaching. You've been explaining things like how the first scene of *Hamlet* gets off... thinking of how things have been done... I suppose some of this sinks down to your gizzard. When it comes to your own work you have made some objective decisions, such as which character is going to tell the story. That's a prime question, a question of control. You have to make a judgement. You find one character is more insistent, he's more sensitive and more pointed than the others. But as for other aspects of structure and craft, I guess, in the actual process of composition or in preliminary thinking, I try to immerse myself in the motive and *feel* toward meanings rather than plan a structure or plan effects. At some point, you know, you have to try to get one with God and *then*, take a hard cold look at what you're

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doing and work on it once more, trusting in your viscera and nervous system and your previous efforts as far as they've gone. The hard thing, the objective thing has to be done before the book is written. And if anybody dreams up *Kubla Khan*, it's going to be Coleridge. If the work is done the dream will come to the man who's ready for that particular dream; it's not going to come just from dreaming in general. After a thing is done, then I try to get tough and critical with myself. But damn it, it may sometimes be too late then. But that is the fate of man. What I am trying to say is that I try to forget the abstractions when I'm actually composing a thing. I don't understand other approaches that come up when I talk to other writers. For instance, some say their sole interest is experimentation: Well, I think that you learn all you can and try to use it. I don't know what is meant by the word "*experiment*"; you ought to be playing for keeps.

INTERVIEWERS

Yes, but there is still great admiration of the so-called "experimental writing" of the twenties. What of Joyce and Eliot?

WARREN

What is "experimental writing"? James Joyce didn't do "experimental writing"—he wrote *Ulysses*. Eliot didn't do "experimental writing"—he wrote *The Waste Land*. When you fail at something you call it an "experiment", an elite word for flop. Just because lines are uneven or capitals missing doesn't mean experiment. Literary magazines devoted to experimental writing are usually filled with works by middle-aged or old people.

INTERVIEWERS

Or middle-aged young people.

WARREN

Young fogeys. In one way of course, all writing that is any good *is* experimental; that is, it's a way of seeing what is possible—what poem, what novel is possible. Experiment—

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they define it as putting a question to nature, and that is true of writing undertaken with seriousness. You put the question to human nature—and especially your own nature—and see what comes out. It is unpredictable. If it is predictable—not experimental in that sense—then it will be worthless.

INTERVIEWERS

The Southern Review contained much fine work, but little purely "experimental", isn't that so?

WARREN

Yes, and there were a lot of good young, or younger writers in it. Not all Southern either—about one half, I should say.

INTERVIEWERS

I remember that some of Algren's first work appeared there.

WARREN

Oh yes, two early stories, for example; and a longish poem about baseball.

INTERVIEWERS

And the story, *A Bottle of Milk for Mother.*

WARREN

And the story *Biceps.* And three or four of Eudora's first stories were there—Eudora Welty—and some of Katherine Anne's novelettes—Katherine Anne Porter.

INTERVIEWERS

There were a lot of critics in it—young ones too.

WARREN

Oh yes, younger then, anyway. Kenneth Burke, F. O. Matthiessen, Theodore Spencer, R. P. Blackmur, Delmore Schwartz, L. C. Knights...

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INTERVIEWERS

Speaking of critics reminds me that you've written criticism as well as poetry, drama, and fiction. It is sometimes said that the practice of criticism is harmful to the rest, have you found it so?

WARREN

On this matter of criticism, something that appalls me is the idea going around now that the practice of criticism is opposed to the literary impulse. Is *necessarily* opposed to it. Sure, it *may* be a trap, it may destroy the creative impulse, but so may drink or money or respectability. But criticism is a perfectly natural human activity and somehow the dullest, most technical criticism may be associated with full creativity. Elizabethan criticism is all, or nearly all, technical—meter, how to hang a line together—kitchen criticism, how to make the cake. People deeply interested in an art are interested in the "how". Now I don't mean to say that that is the only kind of valuable criticism. Any kind is good that gives a deeper insight into the nature of the thing—a Marxist analysis, a Freudian study, the relation to a literary or social tradition, the history of a theme. But we have to remember that there is no *one*, *single*, *correct* kind of criticism, no *complete* criticism. You only have different kinds of perspectives, giving, when successful, different kinds of insights. And at one historical moment one kind of insight may be more needed than another.

INTERVIEWERS

But don't you think that in America now a lot of good critical ideas get lost in terminology, in the gobbledy-gook style of expression?

WARREN

Every age, every group, has its jargon. When the jargon runs away with the insight, that's no good. Sure, a lot of people think they have the key to truth if they have a lingo. And a lot of modern criticism has run off into lingo—into academicism—the wrong kind of academicism, that pretends

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to be unacademic. The real academic job is to absorb an idea, to put it into perspective along with other ideas, not to dilute it to lingo. As for lingo, it's true that some very good critics got bit by the bug that you could develop a fixed critical vocabulary. Well, you can't, except within narrow limits. That is a trap of scientism.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you see some new ideas in criticism now emerging?

WARREN

No, I don't see them now. We've had Mr. Freud and Mr. Marx and—

INTERVIEWERS

Mr. Fraser and *The Golden Bough*.

WARREN

Yes, and Mr. Coleridge and Mr. Arnold and Mr. Eliot and Mr. Richards and Mr. Leavis and Mr. Aristotle, etc. There have been, or are, many competing kinds of criticism with us—but I don't see a new one, or a new development of one of the old kind. It's an age groping for its issue.

INTERVIEWERS

What about the "New Criticism"?

WARREN

Let's name some of them—Richards, Eliot, Tate, Blackmur, Winters, Brooks, Leavis (I guess). How in God's name can you get that gang into the same bed? There's no bed big enough and no blanket would stay tucked. When Ransom wrote his book called the *New Criticism* he was pointing out the vindictive variety among the critics and saying that he didn't agree with any of them. The term is, in one sense, a term without any referent—or with too many referents. It is a term that belongs to the conspiracy theory of history. A lot of people—chiefly aging, conservative literary

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professors, scared of losing prestige, or young instructors afraid of not getting promoted—middle-brow magazine editors—and the flotsam and jetsam of semi-Marxist social-significance criticism left stranded by history—they all had a communal nightmare called the New Criticism to explain their vague discomfort. I think it was something they ate.

INTERVIEWERS

What do you mean—conspiracy?

WARREN

Those folks all had the paranoidal nightmare that there was a conspiracy called the New Criticism, just to do them personal wrong. No, it's not quite that simple but there is some truth in this. One thing that a lot of so-called New Critics had in common was a willingness to look long and hard at the literary object. But the ways of looking might be very different. Eliot is a lot closer to Arnold and the Archbishop of Canterbury than he is to Yvor Winters, and Winters is a lot closer to Irving Babbitt than to Richards, and the exegeses of Brooks are a lot closer to Coleridge than to Ransom, and so on. There has been more nonsense talked about this subject than any I can think of. And a large part of the nonsense, on any side of the question, derives from the assumption that any one kind of criticism is a "correct" criticism. There is no correct or complete criticism.

INTERVIEWERS

You had a piece in the *New Republic* once where you discuss Faulkner's technique. One of the things you emphasize is Faulkner's technique of the "still moment". I've forgotten what you called it exactly; a suspension, in which time seems to hang.

WARREN

That's the frozen moment. Freeze time. Somewhere, almost in a kind of pun, Faulkner himself uses the image of

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a frieze for such a moment of frozen action. It's an important quality in his work. Some of these moments harden up an event, give it its meaning by holding it fixed. Time fluid versus time fixed. In Faulkner's work that's the drama behind the drama. Take a look at Hemingway; there's no time in Hemingway, there are only moments in themselves, moments of action. There are no parents and no children. If there's a parent he is a grandparent off in America somewhere who signs the check, like the grandfather in *A Farewell to Arms*. You never see a small child in Hemingway. You get death in childbirth but you never see a child. Everything is outside of the time process. But in Faulkner there are always the very old and the very young. Time spreads and is the important thing, the terrible thing. A tremendous flux is there, things flowing away in all directions. Moments not quite ready to be shaped are already there, waiting, and we feel their presence. What you most remember about Jason in *The Sound and the Fury*, say, is the fact that he was the treasurer when the children made and sold kites, and kept the money in his pocket. Or you remember Caddy getting her drawers muddy. Everything is already there, just waiting to happen. You have the sense of the small becoming large in time, the large becoming small, the sweep of time over things. That, and the balance of the frozen, abstracted moment against violent significant action. These frozen moments are Faulkner's game. Hemingway has a different game. In Hemingway there's no time at all. He's out of history entirely. In one sense, he tries to deny history, he says history is the bunk, like Henry Ford.

I am in no sense making an invidious comparison between the two writers—or between their special uses of time. They are both powerfully expressive writers. But it's almost too pat, you know, almost too schematic, the polar differences between those two writers in relation to the question of time. Speaking of pairs of writers, take Proust and Faulkner. There may be a lot written on the comparison but I haven't encountered much of it. They'd make a strange but instructive pair to study—in relation to time.

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INTERVIEWERS

Wouldn't you say that there seems to be in the early Hemingway a conscious effort *not* to have a very high center of consciousness within the form of the novel? His characters may have a highly moral significance but they seldom discuss issues, they prefer to hint.

WARREN

Sure, Hemingway sneaks it in, but he is an intensely conscious and even philosophical writer. When the snuck-in thing or the gesture, works, the effect can be mighty powerful. By contrast. French fiction usually has a hero who deals very consciously with the issues. He is his own chorus to the action, as well as the man who utters the equivalent of the Elizabethan soliloquy. Nineteenth century fiction also dealt with the issues. Those novels could discuss them in terms of a man's relation to a woman, or in terms of whether you're going to help a slave run away. Or in terms of what to do about a man obsessed with fighting evil, nature, what have you, in the form of a white whale.

INTERVIEWERS

Your own work seems to have this explicit character. Jack Burden in *All The King's Men* is a conscious center and he is a highly conscious man. He's not there as an omniscient figure, but is urgently trying to discover something. He is involved.

WARREN

Burden got there by accident. He was only a sentence or two in the first version—the verse play from which the novel developed.

INTERVIEWERS

Why did you make the change?

WARREN

I don't know. He was an unnamed newspaper man, a childhood friend of the assassin, an excuse for the young

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doctor, the assassin of the politician, Willie Stark, to say something before he performed the deed. When after two years I picked up the verse version, and began to fool with a novel, the unnamed newspaper man became the narrator. It turned out, in a way, that what he thought about the story was more important than the story itself. I suppose he became the narrator because he gave me the kind of interest I needed to write the novel. He made it possible for me to control it. He is an observer, but he is involved.

INTERVIEWERS

For ten years or more it has been said in the United States that problems of race are an obsession of Negro writers but that they have no place in literature. But how can a Negro writer avoid the problem of race?

WARREN

How can you expect a Southern Negro not to write about race, directly or indirectly, when you can't find a Southern white man who can avoid it?

INTERVIEWERS

I must say that it's usually white Northerners who express a different opinion, though a few Negroes have been seduced by it. And they usually do so on aesthetic grounds.

WARREN

I'd like to add here something about the historical element which seems to me important for this general question. The Negro who is now writing protest *qua* protest strikes me as anachronistic. Protest *qua* protest denies the textures of life. The problem is to permit the fullest range of life into racial awareness. I don't mean to imply that there's nothing to protest about, but aside from the appropriate political, sociological and journalistic concerns, the problem is to see the protest in its relation to other things. Race isn't an isolated thing—I mean as it exists in the U.S.—it becomes a total symbolism for every kind of issue. They all flow into it. And

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out of it. Well, thank God. It gives a little variety to life. At the same time it proclaims the unity of life. You know the kind of person who puts on a certain expression and then talks about "solving" the race problem. Well, it's the same kind of person and the same kind of expression you meet when you hear the phrase "solve the sex problem". This may be a poor parallel, but it's some kind of a parallel. Basically the issue isn't to "solve" the "race problem" or the "sex problem". You don't solve it, you just experience it. Appreciate it.

INTERVIEWERS

Maybe that's another version of William James' "moral equivalent of war". You argue and try to keep the argument clean, all the human complexities in view.

WARREN

What I'm trying to say is this. A few years ago I sat in a room with some right-thinking friends—the kind of people who think you look in the back of the book for every answer—attitude A for situation A, attitude B for situation B, and so on through the damned alphabet. It developed that they wanted a world where everything is exactly alike and everybody is exactly alike. They wanted a production belt of human faces and human attitudes, and the same books on every parlor table.

INTERVIEWERS

Hell, who would want such a world?

WARREN

"Right-thinkers" want it, for one thing. I don't want that kind of world. I want variety and pluralism—and *appreciation*. Appreciation in the context of some sort of justice and decency, and freedom of choice in conduct and personal life. I'd like a country in which these was a maximum of opportunity for any individual to discover his talents and develop his capacities — discover his fullest self and by so doing learn

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to respect other selves a little. Man is interesting in his differences. It's all a question of what you make of the differences. I'm not for differences *per se*, but you just let the world live the differences, live them out, live them up and see how things come out. But I feel pretty strongly about attempts to legislate *un*difference. That is just as much tyranny as trying to legislate difference. Apply that to any differences between healthy and unhealthy, criminal and non-criminal. Furthermore, you can't legislate the future of anybody, in any direction. It's not laws that are going to determine what our great-grand children feel or do. And you can't legislate virtue. The tragedy of a big half of American liberalism is to try to legislate virtue. You can't legislate virtue. You should simply try to establish conditions favorable for the growth of virtue. But that will never satisfy the bully-boys of virtue, the plug-uglies of virtue. They are interested in the production-belt stamp of virtue, attitude A in the back of the book, and not in establishing conditions of justice and decency in which human appreciation can find play. Listen, I'll tell you a story. More than twenty years ago I spent part of a summer in a little town in Louisiana, and like a good number of the population, whiled away the afternoons by going to the local murder trials. One case involved an old Negro man who had shot a young Negro woman for talking meanness against his baby-girl daughter. He had shot the victim with both barrels of a 12-guage at a range of 8 feet, while the victim was in a crap game. There were a dozen witnesses to the execution. Besides that he had sat for half an hour on a stump outside the door of the building where the crap game was going on, before he got down to business. He was waiting, because a friend had lost six dollars to the intended victim and had asked the old man to hold off till he had a chance to win it back. When the friend got the $6.00 back, the old man went to work. He never denied what he had done. He explained it all very carefully, and why he had to do it. He loved his baby-girl daughter and there wasn't anything else he could do. Then he would plead "Not Guilty". But if he got tried and

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convicted—and they couldn't fail to convict—he would get death. If, however, he would plead guilty to manslaughter he could get off light. But he wouldn't do it. He said he wasn't guilty of anything. The whole town got involved in the thing. Well, they finally cracked him. He pleaded guilty and got off light. Everybody was glad, sure—they weren't stuck with something, they could feel good and pretty virtuous. But they felt bad, too. Something had been lost, something a lot of them could appreciate. I used to think I'd try to make a story of this. But I never did. It was too complete, too self-fulfilling, as fact. But to get back to the old man. It took him three days to crack, and when he cracked he was nothing. Now we don't approve of what he did—a status homicide the sociologists call it, and that is the worst sort of homicide, worse than homicide for gain, because status homicide is irrational, and you can't make sense of it, and it is the mark of a low order of society. But because status homicide is the mark of a low order of society, what are we to think about the old man's three-day struggle to keep his dignity? And are we to deny value to this dignity because of the way "they" live down there?

INTERVIEWERS

You feel, then, that one of the great blocks in achieving serious fiction out of sad experience is the assumption that you're on the right side?

WARREN

Once you start illustrating virtue as such you had better stop writing fiction. Do something else, like Y-work. Or join a committee. Your business as a writer is not to illustrate virtue but to show how a fellow may move toward it—or away from it.

INTERVIEWERS

Malraux says that "one cannot reveal the mystery of human beings in the form of a plea for the defense".

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WARREN

Or in the form of an indictment, either.

INTERVIEWERS

What about the Devil's advocate?

WARREN

He can have a role, he can be Jonathan Swift, or something.

INTERVIEWERS

I wonder what these right-thinkers feel when, they confront a Negro, say, the symbol of the under-dog, and he turns out to be a son-of-a-bitch. What do they do—hold a conference to decide how to treat him?

WARREN

They must sure have a problem.

INTERVIEWERS

The same kind of people, they have to consult with themselves to determine if they can laugh at certain situations in which Negroes are involved. Like minstrel shows. A whole world of purely American humor got lost in that shuffle along with some good songs.

WARREN

It's just God-damned hard, you have to admit, though, to sort out things that are symbolically charged. Sometimes the symbolic charge is so heavy you have a hard time getting at the real value really there. You always can, I guess, if the context is right. But hell, a lot of people can't read a context.

INTERVIEWERS

It's like the problem of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*.

WARREN

Yes, suppress the play because it might offend a Jew. Or *Oliver Twist*. Well, such symbolic charges just have to be

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reckoned with and taken on their own terms and in their historical perspective. As a matter of fact, such symbolic charges are present, in one degree or another, in all relationships. They're simply stepped up and specialized in certain historical and social situations. There are mighty few stories you can tell without offending somebody—without some implicit affront. The comic strip of *Li'l Abner* for instance, must have made certain persons of what is called "Appalachian white" origin feel inferior and humiliated. There are degrees as well as difference in these things. Context is all. And a relatively pure heart. *Relatively* pure—for if you had a pure heart you wouldn't be in the bookwriting business in the first place. We're stuck with it in ourselves. What we can write about, if anything. What you can make articulate. What voices you have in your insides and in your ear.

—RALPH ELLISON
—EUGENE WALTER

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THE MAN WHOM THE SEA KEPT AWAKE

I've heard the sea upon the troubled rocks
Waste this past night, with dreams more troubled still,
And where the images that you and I
Would smooth a sullen morning by? The fly,
Some mottled bird, the new brood of the fox?
O nothing will be born again, until
The monkish body and the eye can see
Down to the darkened sea's nobility
That now but seems a dancer on a bed
Glutting the clumsy, storm-delighted dead.

But now before another darkness and before
Another creaking of the hollow trees
That sang to mad and dead saints in the dark,
I'll hunt among the water-heavy bark
A worn, sun-warmed stone upon the shore
Where I can sit to still the arteries
Distracted by the night. Among birch and pine
Here stand the boulders in a forest line,
Once tall and tumbled by some bitter knee,
Or by the wind that blows in from the sea,

That blew the fig trees and the wild goats of Rome
And Greece to bits upon the Attic floor.
I find my stone and sit. Whatever I see
Increases the dream of the destructions of the sea.
Is it enough that we should have sad songs, on stones,
To write away, by lines, the death of Thor?
When sparrows fall, they say its count is taken.
When one mouse shivers, the King upon his throne is shaken.
Les us turn our face to terror before we lose
The nine steps to the bottom of the sea.

—ROBERT BLY

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ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

(a sonnet sequence after Heredia)

I

Under the azure where the noon sun totters,
Its golden poop, its silk pavillions
As radiant as a galaxy of suns,
The ship flies in a heaven of blue waters

And from the hawk-like prow receives its name.
Gripping the rail with jewelled hands, she leans
Into the wind: the last of Egypt's queens,
The queen of sparrow-hawks, is out for game.

Here's Tarsus where the Roman Eagle rules
The empty market place; where, Prince of Fools,
Blond Bacchus draws a final, sober breath;

Where maid and eunuch whisper 'love and death',
While Hawk and Eagle grouse and peck and lurch,
Two parakeets upon a single perch.

II

Glare! Shock! and it is done. An officer
Rallies the bronze platoons. The broken air
Echoes their cries and still their nostrils bear
Myrrh from the battlefield, the acrid myrrh.

Eyes of their comrades count the quiet dead.
Now, in the distance, like dead leaves, they see
The archers of Phraortes whirl and flee,
Glistening with sweat, their heads unhelmeted.

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Under the floating purple, amid the blare
Of trumpeting monitors and level drums,
The eagles bow and point the way he comes,

Magnificent, reining his frightened mare—
This famous, bleeding Antony for whom
The incandescent sun becomes a plume.

III

The lovers pace the terrace nervously,
See Egypt dream beneath a sultry sky,
And hear the Nile, ambitious serpent, sigh
Through Sais and Bubastis for the sea.

The Roman feels beneath his stout cuirass—
Captive soldier cradled like a child—
Bending on his triumphant heart, the wild,
Barbaric body golden as his brass.

Winding his white face in her long black hair,
Her body drunk with lust, as light as air,
She offers up her lips and liquid eyes.

The Imperator bends to take his prize,
Sees in those gold-flecked eyes a troubled sea,
Immense and dark, where broken galleys flee.

—HENRI COULETTE

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SESTINA

I woke by first light in a wood
Right in the shadow of a hill
And saw about me in a circle
Many I knew, the dear faces
Of some I recognized as friends.
I knew that I had lost my way.

I asked if any knew the way.
They stared at me like blocks of wood.
They turned their backs on me, those friends,
And struggled up the stubborn hill
Along that road which makes a circle.
No longer could I see their faces.

But there were trees with human faces.
Afraid, I ran a little way
But must have wandered in a circle.
I had not left that human wood;
I was no farther up the hill.
And all the while I heard my friends

Discussing me, but not like friends.
Through gaps in trees I glimpsed their faces.
(The trees grow crooked on that hill.)
Now all at once I saw the way:
Above a clearing in the wood
A lone bird wheeling in a circle

And in that shadowed space the circle
Of those I thought of still as friends.
I drew near, calling, and the wood
Rang and they turned their deaf faces
This way and that, but not my way.
I stood alone upon the hill.

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And it grew dark. Behind the hill
The sun slid down, a fiery circle;
Screeching, the bird flew on her way.
It was too dark to see my friends.
But then I saw them, and their faces
Were leaning above me like a wood.

Around me they circle on the hill.
But what is wrong with my friends' faces?
Why have they changed that way to wood?

—DONALD JUSTICE

A CONFESSION TO E

I horde the ways I feel like Dresden cups,
Examining each posture of affection.
Then adding scalding pride for your inspection
I tap each one and tip it to my lips.

Thus if I come to you as if I wander
Past miscellaneous objects while you sit,
Remember I am careful not to squander
Pure anguish in defiance of my wit.

Thus if I come to you and you are sure
That pardon puts me ever in your debt,
Remember how I pledged you to endure
The measure of your tears without regret.

Remember too hot pride can cool as sweet,
More delicate and richer than deceit.

—RICHARD M. ELMAN

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A FARMER'S GETTING UP

In the first half-light of the morning the farmer turns toward
the window
Besides which he sleeps; through which he sees his fields
Covered with Spring mist like that first layer of feminine flesh
Which it seems we can see through;—where the nearer fields
dissolve into it,
As dark as the flesh the larger surfaces of her legs round
into.
We are content as there rises from these to our nostrils
the ageless memory of a home:
Of the manured land we have never been able to live too
long away from.

While the dawn is still the first white token of itself,
As if it were paper laid for the fire of the day to build
itself on,
We get into our clothes, as worn as the apron that hangs
by the kitchen stove,
And into shoes in which our feet go on flat land bent to
the curve of the furrow's depth.
We walk to the barnyard and the animal life we never
surprise asleep
Carrying in our arms yeaterday's swill, meat for the dogs,
And perhaps a bouquet that has begun to smell during
the night in the house.
We cross the yard and begin to feel beneath the hens for
their eggs,
Leaving them ruffled, but whole again, on the empty shells
of their nests;
And while we are pitching a little hay at the horse in his
stall,
That he paws at with his hoof impatient for the open fields,

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We find there too, in the final passivity of her eyes,
That look in which a woman's eyes answer for the rest of
her life at childbirth.
The cow that begs her release from the fields she has turned
over night to milk.

While the sun still moves somewhere above the dark of
our hat, at work in the fields
Earning our slow bread, we leave off paying for the day
that is past
And begin paying for the day that is ahead; the day that
begins at night,
In the white ash of the hearth, and ends in the morning
with the white of the milk:
The work we do on our lands gives us only ever enough
To replant our lands; it is like having a wife;—
In return for our care, they afford us a living.

—THEODORE HOLMES

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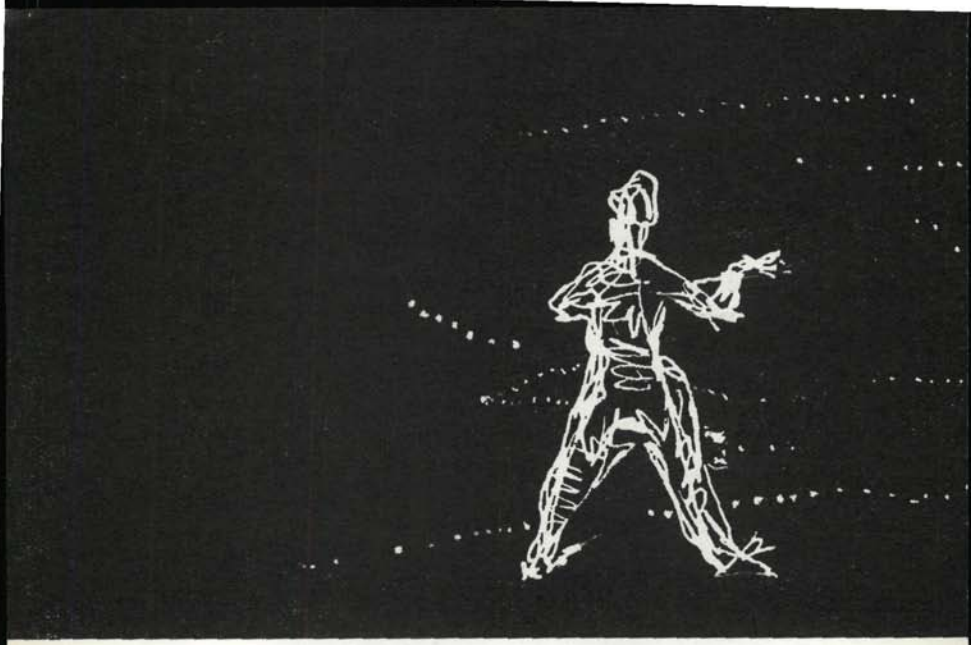

Les Saltimbanques

On the Boardwalk at Coney Island barefooted boys were screeching, their feet, their feet were being scorched by the burning wood planks. It was four-thirty of a mid-week afternoon, but still the sun was melting the Boardwalk strollers.

Lev Elson, nearly fifty, with dry grey hair, and a little, dry, grey mustache, was feeling stranded because finally the summer had begun. He clacked along, his briefcase hitting monotonously against his leg.

He had just finished teaching his last class of the year, fifth grade arithmetic, fractions, and had distributed report cards emblazoned with gold stars and A's, and had received from his home-room class a box of White Owl cigars, gesture of departure that he felt he did not deserve. They sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," and he had cried, guilt-ridden, and not wanting to leave the safe cave of his elementary school life.

Now, against his will, but with no other choice, he was walking home, to his year-round apartment by the shore. He stopped to weigh himself, with and without his briefcase.

—Drawing by Lucille Littel

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by Marvin Schiller

He weighed one hundred and seventy-two pounds, softly apportioned, and his briefcase weighed sixteen. His fortune read, *You expect a great deal from your friends because you are sincere*, and for a moment he was pleased. The movie-star depicted on the fortune card in sepia monochrome was the young Spencer Tracy. All his life, it seemed, Lev had placed pennies in fortune machines and someone like the young Spencer Tracy or Warner Baxter came out—always ten or fifteen years behind the times, and never connecting with anyone really glamorous. His son, on the other hand, had once had his fortune printed on the back side of Anna May Wong.

From near the Boardwalk rail he heard a woman's laughter, and Lev turned to see his wife, Regina, seated beneath her faded beach umbrella. She had, one year, forced it between the slats of this favorite bench, warping the boards so that now it fitted in quite naturally. She sat between two women dressed in sunsuits. The one on the right fanned herself with a piece of folded newspaper. Regina turned her head over her shoulder, looking away from the ocean, and part of her face

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caught the sun. She saw Lev and cried out loud, "Look, here comes my big wheel!"

And now Lev felt the new season of deceit begin.

He pretended to look directly at her, smiled, but stared off beyond the railing. On the horizon's hair, at this distance delicately balanced, two barges were being pulled by a tug. Its smoke lifted and then diminished, soothing to observe.

The women were laughing. Lev walked up to them and stood behind the bench. His wife, thin and tan as autumn leaves, dark-haired and pretty, aged forty-five, gripped the umbrella's staff with her small hand to brace herself.

"I forgot my key this morning," said Lev.

She leaned back from under the umbrella, and ignited by his voice, cried, "Oh, you poor *boychick!*" The veins of her wrist swelled, as though some other self deep within her wished futilely to escape. "Whatta ya gonna do? How ya gonna get in? How ya gonna shave f'school t'morra?"

She turned her back and sank back into the shade. Lev walked to the front of the bench and leaned against the rail, facing the three women. He lifted his briefcase. "No more," he said. "Last day. Today was the last day."

"O-oh-h-h, so let me see your report card? Did you get promoted or left back?"

Lev raised his hand, supplicating. "Please, Regina..."

"What's the matter, you wanna leave the room?"

The woman who fanned herself giggled and put her arm around Regina's back. The woman at her left was embarrassed.

"Excuse me," she said, beginning to duck out from under the umbrella.

Regina restrained her. "Stay, Henrietta. We'll continue in a second."

Henrietta sat down. "Perhaps your husband..."

"Why? It's only Moisha Pipick. I thought you had to leave the room, Moisha?"

It occurred to Lev that he had no doubt forgotten his key on purpose that morning, subconsciously unable to bear the thought of summer at home this year. "If you could just give me the key, so I could open the door to the house."

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"Oh, give him the key, already," said the woman who fanned herself.

Lev looked away.

From a Boardwalk bar-and-grill dance music sweetened the seaweed-stained air. Lev imagined the bar's cool haven—the beer smell and the happily subterranean, unsunny interior he had begun to frequent with his son, Milton, who was now gone from home for the first time. Lev had been stunned by the boy's enlistment in the service, and still, after eight months, was unable to figure out why the boy had not at least, at the very least after all the years of comradeship, consulted him.

"My big wheel," Regina was saying. "What am I gonna do with him? Every Fall I send him back to school, year in, year out, and still he don't get promoted. Left back every year. And look at him there, with a biefcase—like a diplomat in the U.N. Tell us, Moisha Pipick, who's gonna win the war?"

And this bitterness of Regina's, which at first had actually disappeared after Milton's enlistment, was now growing more wrathful because Lev, in his confusion, had not acknowledged her change. In the first month's of Milton's departure she had softened toward Lev, and he had merely sat there as one stupefied. Why didn't the boy write to them, he had kept asking her—or phone them, at least?

He stood away from the rail, holding the briefcase with both hands in front of him. "It's so warm today, Regina. Can I just change my clothes? And my briefcase is so heavy. Filled up. I emptied my drawers..."

"Such a sad case!"

Lev placed the briefcase on the Boardwalk.

After a moment, Henrietta said, "I bet it's good to be finished with school, Mr. Elson."

"Oh, yes..."

Behind the shaded bench, on the Boardwalk, tourists ambled by. Couples drifted toward The Tunnels of Love. Barkers repeated their arcade calls into the summer air. An old woman dragged her grandchild to Feltman's "Poker Roll", and from the populated sand, out of Lev's sight, came the tired call of a young boy hawking ice cream bars.

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"And tonight," Lev went on, nodding at Henrietta, "I'll be starting summer work. At the *Globe*. I bought a part interest in it for the summer."

"*Oy, vay iz meer!*" said Regina. "He's actually going to go through with running that vulgar ferris wheel! What a man I'm married to!"

Lev picked up the briefcase, his arm stiffening, beginning to ache. "If you give me the key I can call my partner and I'll arrange to be out of the house tonight. You can play cards unmolested tonight. I shan't disturb you."

"Oh, here!" She took a single key from her dress pocket and slapped it into his hand. "Depart!"

He placed the key in his pants, regretful because he felt he was to blame for her being undignified. He sought something soothing, reasonable to say.

"Was there any mail from Milton?"

"Lev, depart! There was nothing. You're giving me a headache. You've got the key, go!" She turned abruptly away from him.

Oh, be reasonable, Regina, Lev thought to himself. Am I not suffering the same punishment you are? Isn't the boy gone from both of us?

Henrietta had noticed a friend on the beach. She pointed her out. They called and waved—and the junto was in session again.

Lev turned on his heels and limped away. Someday there would be a rebirth here, he thought. This life would not do. Something new would have to be begun here. But how? Where does rebirth begin? He had admitted his guilt. He had been selfish with regard to the boy's affections. But Regina, he longed to say—Contrition, Absolution—Rebirth. He walked toward home and continued to ponder, the briefcase thumping against his side as he headed down the steep wooden slope that led to his street.

Squat, heavy apartment buildings blockaded either side of the street. No sun reached through at this time of the day, and an absence of trees gave the block an unhealthy winter feeling. Unfamiliar cars that bathers had driven to the shore were parked at the curbs. In the narrowed gutter three boys played a desultory game of stickball, and as Lev passed, one of

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them cried out to him, "Hey, Mr. Elson, free rides tonight?"

Lev waved back. Why not, he thought. He paused at the curb and leaned against the fender of an old car. He valued the friendship of these boys—Milton's contemporaries. "A free ride for all the boys on the block."

The boy wore a white T-shirt and khaki pants, and bounced a ball into his hands. "No kiddin'?"

"Sure. Spread it around. It's part of our promotion."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Elson." He rested his hands on his hips. "Hey, you hear from Milt?"

Lev leaned quickly away from the car and stared at the boy suspiciously. Did he know Milton didn't write home?

"Where's Milt at now, Mr. Elson?"

"Germany," he lied.

Yeah, how do you like that? You know Stanley Seigal got a post card from him from France. A French post card."

"Is that right? When did he get the card?"

Lev started. His voice rose, and he began to work his way out between the bumpers of two cars. With his forefinger he brushed new perspiration from his small mustache.

"He got it this morning."

Lev was in the gutter, and he went up to the boy. The other two young men, bored or weary, sat on the running board of a parked sedan.

"Listen," said Lev. "Can you ask Stanley to come over to the *Globe* tonight? Do me a favor?"

"Sure, Mr. Elson."

"And ask him to bring the card, yes? You don't know what it says, *kindt*?"

The boy looked down. "I think what's on it is like personal, for between fellas, you know what I mean?"

Lev grew tense, afraid even this second-hand, impersonal, almost Peep-Tom contact with his son would be denied him. He touched the boy's shoulder. "Tell Stanley I would consider it a big favor if he brought it with him."

"Well, I'll tell him..."

"Tell Stanley if he brings the card he can go on the *Globe* by himself, run the whole shooting match right from where he sits. It's possible."

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"Well, holy cow, man—I mean, O.K., Mr. Elson, I'll tell him."

Lev dropped his hand from the boy's shoulder, almost awed.

"I got to get back in the game now," the boy said. "Excuse me."

He broke away, and the other two young men stood up. He threw the ball toward them. They started to play, and for a moment Lev thought he might watch them. But he did not have the patience. He returned to the sidewalk and hurried to his apartment, excited.

He changed into a pair of lightweight checkered slacks, and blue canvas shoes with rubber soles. Carefully, he hung away his school clothes. He was in a mood to place things in order, so he emptied the contents of his briefcase on the bare living room floor. (The figured rug was rolled onto a bamboo pole, stored behind the sofa that had a bedsheet over it to protect it for the summer.) Then he packed his books and papers and desk paraphernalia into the already cramped drawers and pigeon holes of the secretary. The empty briefcase he placed in the camphor-hung closet of the dark hallway between the bedrooms. He went through the apartment straightening the furniture. The slightest crease in a sheet covering for a chair disturbed him, and smoothing them was greatly satisfying. To himself he began to imagine the method of hinting to Regina a card from Milton had arrived. Settling in the wingchair near the window that looked out onto the beach and the ocean he began to daydream.

When Regina slammed into the apartment, wakening him, it was not dark outdoors but she turned on the bright ceiling light, hurting his eyes. She flew into her room, Milton's old room, which she had taken over. Reappearing in a slip she shuffled barefoot through the living room. Her body was still that of a young woman and she moved as though she meant to tantalize Lev. She turned on the television set in a corner of the room, and sat in front of it, her back to Lev. A news program flashed on the screen, and she switched it to a film of a band playing Latin music. She sat back, closed her eyes and began to shake her shoulders almost imperceptibly in time to the mambo rhythm.

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Softly, Lev said, "You know, I got my paycheck today."

He rose and went to her side, standing over her. "I thought maybe we could go out to dinner, celebrate at Lundy's. A shore dinner, darling. A few drinks..." He started to put his hand out to touch her.

"Can't you see I'm by the television?"

Lev walked to the doorway, hurt, and he switched off the ceiling light. The room dimmed. The image on the screen appeared sharper, and he thought this would please her. He smiled and returned to her side.

"I thank you," she said.

"I could—I could change my shirt; put on my good jacket. We could have a few drinks there..."

"How many times I gotta tell you, Lev? Don't talk to me when I'm by the television. How can I hear what's happening when you're yelling in my ears? This is not your *Globe* you got to yell so much."

Lev gripped the back of the chair, seeing the soft darkness of her shoulders, her hair parted in the center brushed tightly above her neck.

"I thought maybe you might be tired. We could eat dinner out. My last day of teaching was today."

"*Oy*, Lev, drop dead with your teaching, yes?"

She leaned forward and changed the station again. It was a children's program but she left it on. A puppet in the costume of a court magician ranted across the screen.

"You think that sounds like a lady when you talk?" he said, beginning to lose control. "What is it? Sophisticated? Modern?"

"Of course, darling. I learned it from Arthur Godfrey. Anything else?"

She snuggled more deeply into the chair, and Lev saw her hands move between her legs, creasing the slip, outlining her thighs. He stared at her profile but she did not turn to him.

"If you want me to help you with dinner in the house," he began quietly again.

"Will you go, please?"

He turned away and went to the window, sitting again in

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the wingchair, her form hardly visible to him now. "I'll go eat by the *Globe*," he said, almost to himself.

"Go," she said, talking to the screen. "Where else would you go? You just bought that thing so you could get away from me..."

"Not at all!"

"You have no son to spend your time with, so now you got a machine. Well, good luck. A machine doesn't have any brains, maybe you'll get along better."

On the screen the puppet sorcerer chanted a spell, smoke puffed up and he was obliterated. A king appeared.

Lev stood up and said, "I'm going to meet Stanley Seigal there tonight. Stanley had a post card from Milton. Maybe there's regards."

"Don't Lev. Don't oil me up."

"Why not, Regina? Maybe Milt has said, 'If you see my momma give her a kiss for me'."

"Will you stop it? Do you think I even care?"

"Of course you do, darling."

"Drop dead!"

She leaned forward and shut off the set, her slip as she moved, hanging away from her body so that Lev could see her breast, and then she sank back into the chair, spent and flushed. She sighed deeply, her chest rising as she breathed and her slip creasing and glistening silkenly.

Lev turned away as though it was improper to gaze at her, the unwanted lover of a woman who would scream if she were merely touched. Empty-feeling, he returned to his room and put on a plaid sport jacket and a soft cap. He walked slowly back to the parlor, his mind struggling to understand what she wanted. For several moments the apartment was still except for the sound of his feet shuffling toward the doorway.

"Where are you going?" she said without looking up.

Lev stopped, his hand on the knob of the entrance door. "I'll get something to eat by the *Globe*."

She rose and went into the kitchen. Through its open door Lev saw her turn on the light. She opened the refrigerator and withdrew a filled glass casserole that had been marinating during the day. She lit the oven and without pausing in the

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work she said, "Stay. I prepared a supper for your big today."

"Regina," Lev started to say, going toward her. From the doorway he saw that the table had been set with the good silver.

"The big end of school." She rattled pots from a cabinet.

He wanted to kiss her. She bent over the stove to adjust the heat, and again the slip fell away from her body.

"Afterwards we can go our for a drink," he said lovingly. "You can put on the dress without a midriff. If only Milton was here!"

"Honestly!" she cried. She banged the stove shut.

"What?!"

"Honestly!"

"What?! He whirled, dumbstruck by the sharpness of her voice.

"Why do I pamper you?"

"For god's sakes, Regina!"

"Why are you standing there? What are you looking at? You wanna do something, go shave off your mustache. Maybe you'll look like somebody." She stood unmoving in the center of the kitchen.

"I don't understand you at all," said Lev, shaking his head, moving out of the kitchen. He rubbed over the grey mustache on his upper lip as though indeed this were the vulnerable place he must guard. Her demands that he shave it off had grown as a theme from the early days of their quarrel over Milton, for she knew Lev had begun to grow his mustache when she had first told him he was to be a father. In her mind, Lev knew, she had decided a superstitious closeness existed between the boy and himself. He had made too much of a fetish of having a mustache and a son grow concurrently.

He had drifted into the living room. He sat in the wingchair near the window.

In the kitchen Regina was murmuring to herself bitterly.

And Lev saw her as she had been—17, lovely, an innocent. During their honeymoon she had played Victor Herbert for him on the piano on the veranda of a summer hotel. He had been full of aspirations for their life together—a beautiful property in Manhattan Beach, a joint checking account built

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up sky-high out of money Regina's aunt in Cleveland had left them. What a hopeless dream for a man like Lev: he had, up to the age of twenty three, saved pennies in a glass milk bottle. What did he know about money? He lost it all, investing it with his brother who ran off to Buenos Aires with it; and it became an agony for Lev to face Regina. At first, she had not cared, but his guilt had made him morose, and during the 30's her innocence tarnished, and he felt to blame, as if the loss of innocence was to be deplored, was a disease she had caught from him. He had turned to Milton, as though in loving him he could prove his manliness. And Regina became nothing more than a survivor in her own house.

Outside, now, the colored lights and neon flickering of Coney Island pulsed an electric fog above the shore, spelling out *Whip*, and *Steeplechase*, and, from the high tower of the parachute jump that sailed people skyward, out of the Boardwalk life, a sign flashed *Life Saver, Life Saver.*

Lev shut his eyes, his fingers rubbing his dry mustache, thinking Dear God in heaven, let us be new. I am a lonely man.

From the kitchen he heard Regina talking to herself. "Moisha Pipick," he heard her repeat. She laughed to herself. "Moisha Pipick, my husband." He winced, his shut eyes tightening.

When he ate supper later on, it was alone, the plate on his lap as he sat in the darkness near the window. He tried to lose himself in the gentle rise and fall of the breakers that swashed along the beach. A breeze rose and fluttered the venetian blinds in the apartment, and they tapped against the windows. The moon appeared, full and orange over the ocean, full of the sense of the summer to come.

Regina was dressing in Milton's old room, preparing for her evening of cards. Lev finished eating and washed his plate and stored it in its cabinet. He shuffled down the hall and knocked on her door, and asked if she would like to come to the *Globe*.

"Stanley might not let me bring home the post card," he said.

"Who cares?" she said.

"It's Milton's handwriting," he said at the door. Then

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unable to stop himself, he turned the knob and let himself in.

And Regina, screwing an earring to her ear in front of a mirror, spun toward him, crying, "What are you doing in here?"

"Regina, stop it!" he cried.

"Go—go to your son!"

The bell rang, and Lev, furious, started.

"Your lousy friends!" he cried.

"At least I got friends!"

"Allow me to usher them in!"

In a rage, Lev flew out to the entrance door.

He was greeted by a very fat boy with a pudgy face, wearing a short-sleeved flowered shirt draped over his pants. It was Stanley Seigal. Immediately, Lev was ashamed for having yelled at Regina.

"Stanley," said Lev, surprised. "Come in. I haven't seen you since Milton left. Come in, *kindt*. How you been?"

Stanley hesitated in the doorway. "I just stopped for one second, Mr. Elson. Phil said you wanted to see Milton's card."

"Oh, yes, yes, but you too, Stanley. I mean, how you been?" Lev leaned back excitedly. "Regina," he called out. "Stan is here."

He felt that he must not make the card seem overimportant. But his heart had begun to beat, and impulsively he took Stanley's arm, afraid the boy might leave too quickly.

"Have a drink, Stan. A beer? What do you like?"

Stanley shook his head, and took out the post card from his shirt pocket.

"I brought Milt's card, but I can't stay. I'm working in my father's studio." He handed the card to Lev. "Here."

Lev took the card and placed it in his jacket pocket, holding it delicately in his fingers.

"You can give it back when you're finished," said Stanley.

Lev groped for Stanley's hand, staring at his face. He shook his hand very hard. "You're a good boy, Stan. You..."

"I mean you could copy out what it says, I don't mind. It's just I like the picture on the back."

"Oh, sure," said Lev. He took the card out and looked at the picture, approving, nodding at Stanley. It was a repro-

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duction of Picasso's famous painting, soft pinks and blue, of the resting family of saltimbanques.

"Lovely," said Lev, gazing at the painting, afraid to turn it over.

"Goodbye, Mr. Elson, I got to go."

"Sure, Stan. Thank you so much."

Stanley went down the outer hall and descended the steps at its end.

Lev closed the door and went to the wingchair. He was unable to take his eyes from the painting, as though it had been selected by Milton to convey a hidden message, as though all along Milton had known Lev would see this card. *Les Saltimbanques* was not an expression Lev knew, but he saw the contented child resting against its mother's knee, the erect, eternal father, enduring, proud, and Lev understood. This was a family.

His fingers trembled but he turned the card over and saw Milton's small, sloped-backwards handwriting, pencilled, smudged and nearly illegible from its transatlantic travels. But the sight of it was like the sudden figure of the boy appearing unexpectedly from within a crowd on a street, and Lev looked hard, still unable to believe it was Milton. Then an image of Milton came to him, bent over a table, a pencil poised in his slender fingers as he wrote this card. Lev looked all over the card, seeing the pretty stamp, the printed inscription, the post-mark of Paris, and Stanley's name and address. He read without reading, just seeing the lines and curls of words until it came to where it had been signed, *Milton*. He read and he brought the card closer to his face, and it seemed as if Milton were standing there in front of him. He was crying softly to himself and he pressed the card against his cheek, thinking, Milton...

From Milton's room he heard Regina shutting drawers and opening the closet. She would feel so much better after she read the card!

He took the card from his face and looked at it again, blurred now through his quiet tears, and he read, *Dear Stanley, How are you? You ought to leave Coney Island forever and come to Gay Paree. Here the girls love even fat men and you would not have any trouble...*

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Lev was crying or laughing fully now. He could hardly read or comprehend.

How are the boys? How is your photography? Are you going in with your father? Army life is pretty bad...

Everything will be all right, *kindt*. We'll write to each other. Lev remembered how Milton had been the target of fights between Regina and himself; how the boy, in despair, had begun slamming out of the house. Butit would change now.

Sometimes I'm sorry I joined, but I'm lucky to be in Europe. Maybe later I'll settle down here. I hear Italy is the greatest. Regards to everyone. Your buddy, Milton.

Regina walked into the living room, and Lev looked up, the hand holding the card falling to his lap. She was wearing a white summer dress cut low over her breast and off her shoulders.

"You're still here?" she said.

Lev covered his face with his hand, and nodded, trying to conceal his emotion. *Leave Coney Island forever*, the card had said, and *Maybe I'll settle down here—Italy*—and he had not been mentioned at all! Neither mother nor father!

Regina walked into the kitchen. "I thought I had the end of you tonight," she called.

Lev could not bring himself to read the card again. He found himself staring at *Les Saltimbanques*. There were signs that they worked in a carnival. The man was young and agile and his hand touched lovingly his wife's shoulder. The wife was dark and perhaps she was weary, but she was watchful of the child.

Milton, what are you telling me here?

"Lev?"

'Go, go to your son!' Regina had said. Was it even possible?

"What are you doing in there?" Regina called.

It was true, actually, Milton had been his shield, his sponge for taking up love. And Regina—where had she turned? To card games? To days of squinting on the Boardwalk? Looking for what?

Lev rose and walked to the secretary where earlier in the day he had stored his pencils and pens and pads from school.

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He opened out the desk and pulled a chair up to it. He heard Regina fixing supper for herself.

"*Nu*, Moisha?" she called.

He cleared his throat and set the card on the desk. "I'm just reading Milton's card, darling. Stanley brought it."

He heard her scrape a chair across the linoleum floor, and the sounds of a knife cutting on top of a plate. She did not speak.

From a pigeon hole in the desk Lev took out a soap eraser.

"I'll leave it for you on the desk, my darling," he said gently. "It's a beautiful card."

He held the eraser carefully between his fingers and rubbed out the last grey pencilled lines, blowing away the tiny rubber crumbs, gathering them in his palm and emptying them into his pocket. He put the eraser back and took out a soft pencil. Then, imitating Milton's handwriting, knowing he could not match it exactly but unable to stop from writing, he added in the cleansed space... *and I am very lonesome for my home. Especially if you see my momma tell her I miss her, and I love her. I send her a kiss and I will write her soon.*

Lev put the pencil down, and with his finger gently smudged the writing until it seemed to resemble the rest of Milton's card. It was not a good job, but he was excited, and he propped it against the little drawers of the desk.

He stood up and went to the kitchen door. Regina was sipping a cup of tea.

"I left Milton by the desk for you, Momma," he said.

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PEGASUS:

A COMEDY IN EIGHT SCENES

I

He threw his bat down third and seized the pen:
"My words will make the ages better men!"

II

"To say the sun direct!" They clanked their beer,
and heard their stomachs cry, the angels cheer.

III

Even his dog disliked it. "Trite! Amen."
He wept and ate the lions in his den.

IV

"Have you read Mr. Cammbry? You hadn't heard!
He flapped his wings one day and was a bird."

V

"And now, in this falling age?" "The world will last."
"He's right! He's right!" He couldn't. The world went past.

VI

"Once upon, a poet went to words."
Some small songs came—Perfection. It was absurd.

VII

His final statement came out on a stone:
"I fought with time and now it holds its own."

VIII

The rhymes went mad; the diction strange. "My dear!"
The ages wept and dropped him like a tear.

—PAUL PETRIE

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

William Fifield *(Summerhill Madhouse)* is winner of an O'Henry Memorial Award in the short story and has been widely published. A long novel, *The Devil's Marchioness*, the story of Madeleine, Marchioness de Brinvilliers, a famous poisoner, was published last May by Dial Press in New York and will appear in London this September. Mr. Fifield lives in a small village in the wine country near Bordeaux.

Marvin Schiller *(Les Saltimbanques)* lives in New York and has been published in *New World Writing* and the *Stanford Short Story Anthology*. He is now at work on a novel.

Tanizaki Junichirō *(The Victim)* is one of Japan's most noted writers. Some of his stories, including *The Victim*, reflect his early interest in the works of Poe and Baudelaire. A novel entitled *Some Prefer Nettles*, written in 1928, was published by Knopf in 1955. His translator, Ivan Morris, is a writer of fiction and an expert on international affairs who has been living in Tokyo for the last year.

PORTFOLIO

Tom Keogh, recently commissioned to draw a series on the history of jazz, shut himself into his studio high on the Île de la Cité with a pile of old records and emerged two days later with the sketches from which the portfolio is selected. An extremely versatile artist, Keogh has designed for the cinema, the theatre, and for the ballets of Roland Petits and Jeanmaire, and Jean Babillee. His paintings were exhibited this spring at galleries in both London and Rome.

INTERVIEWS

Pati Hill *(Interview with Truman Capote)* is author of a novel, *The Nine Mile Circle*, published this summer by Houghton Mifflin and highly praised by critics. Her journal, *The Pit and the Century Plant*, was published by Harper. Selections from both books first appeared in THE PARIS REVIEW.

Ralph Ellison *(Interview with Robert Penn Warren)* is the author of *The Invisible Man*, a first novel which won him the Prix de Rome. He was himself interviewed in the Art of Fiction series in THE PARIS REVIEW for Spring, 1955. **Eugene Walter**, associate editor of this magazine, is also on the staff of *Botteghe Oscure*, the international literary magazine published in Rome where he lives. Winner of the Lippincott Prize for his novel *The Untidy Pilgrim*, he was awarded a Sewanee Fellowship in Poetry last year.

CHRONICLE

Christopher Rand *(Buddha's Anniversary)* has reported on Asia for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *Harper's* and other publications. He is now writing in America.

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POETRY

Robert Bly *(The Man Whom the Sea Kept Awake)* is a Fulbright scholar in Norway. His verse appeared in the first two issues of THE PARIS REVIEW. He studied at both the University of Iowa and at Harvard where he won the Lloyd Garrison Prize for Poetry in 1950.

Henri Coulette *(Antony and Cleopatra)* whose poetry appeared in New Campus Writing, is a student at the University of Iowa.

Richard Elman *(A Confession to E)* lives in Palo Alto, California, where he is a graduate assistant at Stanford University. He held a Stanford Creative Writing Fellowship in Fiction. *Talisman* has published his work.

John Fairfax *(Call Up)* published his *Death Among Ships* in the 7th issue of THE PARIS REVIEW. He lives with his wife and son in a stone cottage near the ruins of Sherbourne Castle, Dorset.

Charles Gullans *(Narcissus)* is a student at the University of Washington.

Theodore Holmes, *(A Farmer's Getting Up)* is a student at Iowa. He will publish his first collection of verse this summer in Scribners' *Poet's of Today IV*.

Donald Justice *(Sestina)* studied under Yvor Winters; he has published both short stories and poetry in most of the major American literary magazines.

Philip Levine *(Arbor Day, The Drunkard)* studied under Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Paul Engle at Iowa where he is now an English instructor. A book of his poems is to be published this autumn by Cummington Press.

Robert Mezey *(Equatorial)* a 21-year-old undergraduate at Iowa was publishing poetry at the age of 18. His *In the Environs of the Funeral Home* appeared in No. 15 of THE PARIS REVIEW.

Stephen Orgel *(Nocturne, Three Ways of Looking at St. Sebastian)* is studying for the doctorate at Harvard. While an undergraduate at Columbia, he edited the *Columbia Review*.

Paul Petrie *(Pegasus–A Comedy in Eight Scenes)* is working with Paul Engle at the writer's workshop at Iowa.

Wesley Trimpi *(Oedipus to the Oracle)* is an instructor in English at Stanford. Alan Swallow published his first book of poems, *The Mask of Perseus*, in 1953.

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SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS

RESTAURANTS, BARS, AND CABARETS

LEFT BANK

Maison Alaux, 106. Blvd. Montparnasse, 14e, Dan. 54–33. Established in 1910. Alaux is famous as the favorite restaurant of Lenin and Trotsky in exile. Moderate prices.

Restaurant Sainte-Beuve, 8, rue Sainte-Beuve. Greek specialties. Moderate prices. English speaking, family cooking. Artists and their friends.

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La Bouteille d'Or, 9, Quai de Montebello, 5e, Ode. 52–58. A good restaurant opposite Notre Dame. Specialite: "La Frecassee de Poulet comme en Provence". Not expensive.

Coq d'Or, 13, rue Malebranche, 5e, Dan. 25–43. Russian and oriental specialties. Slav atmosphere. Good and reasonable.

Schnockeloch, 17, Rue Gregoire-de-Tours Paris, 6e, Ode 46–96. Restaurant-Bar Alsacien. Specialités Alsaciennes. Choucroute Maison-ses vins d'Alsace d'Origine.

RIGHT BANK

La Truite, 30, rue Fauborg St. Honoré, 8e, Anj. 12–86. One of Paris' most distinguished restaurants. Features delicious Norman specialties. On a picturesque court off the Right Bank.

Chatelet, 6, Rue Saint-Denis, Place du Chatelet. Gut 42–41. A convenient, middle-priced restaurant almost next door to the Theatre du Chatelet. Excellent for meals before the show. The service is good and rapid.

Moscou, 7, rue Jean Giraudoux, 16e, Pas. 21-25. The oldest Russian restaurant in Paris. Russian and French specialities. Excellent service, intimate, and not all expensive.

MONTMARTRE

Chez Aglae, 9 bis Rue Pigalle, 9e. A quick-service, lowpriced restaurant. Italian food served "at the Bar" or in the back parlour up to midnight.

Au Relais Normand, 32, rue d'Orsel, 18e. First class, plentiful cuisine in the best Norman tradition. Old world decor, intimate, with quick service. Moderately priced.

SHOPPING IN PARIS

LA DAUPHINE, 94 rue de Grenelle. Fine antiques, furniture, and a wide selection of old prints. Many beautiful objects at reasonable prices.

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The Paris American Art Co., 2, rue Bonaparte, 6e. Everything for the artist and sculptor, whatever the medium.

Galerie Ascher, 1 rue des Beaux-Arts. Ode. 73–49. Objets d'hautes époques. Antiques from Greece, Egypt, Africa. Primitive artifacts.

Berggruen & Cie., 70, rue de l'Université. Paintings and prints by Picasso, Klee, Miro, Chagall, etc. Large choice.

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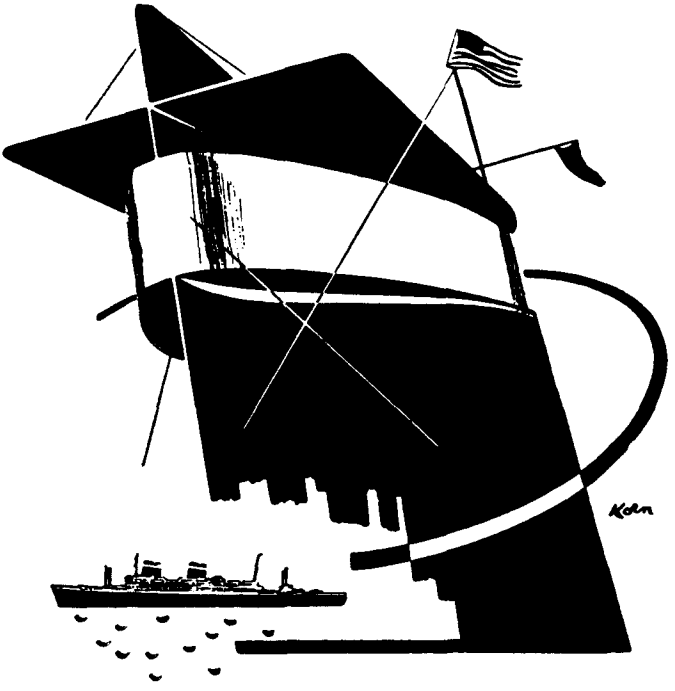

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